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I R I S.

VOL. III.

IRIS

BY

MRS. RANDOLPH

AUTHOR OF

"GENTIANELLA," "WILD HYACINTH,"

"LITTLE PANSY," "RESEDA,"

ETC. ETC.

"Prouder than blue Iris."

Troilus and Cressida, A. 1. Sc. 3.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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IRIS.

CHAPTER I.

When headstrong passion gets the rein of reason,
The force of Nature, like too strong a gale,
For want of ballast, oversets the vessel.

The Generous Conqueror. HIGGONS.

His soul, like bark with rudder lost,
On passion's changeful tide was tost ;
Nor voice, nor virtue had the power
Beyond th' impression of the hour ;
And O, when passion rules, how rare
The hours that fall to virtue's share !

ROKEBY.

THE next day both Iris and Eve went to
the large pool at Beechmont to skate.
Both were fond of, and excelled in the

amusement, and Mrs. Pleydell said that very probably she should come up herself during the morning. They must remember not to tire themselves too much, as they were to dine out.

The Great Pool, as it was called, was a very lovely spot, situated in the centre of the beech woods, beautiful glades of which sloped down to it. It was of very considerable extent, and possessed three or four islands, covered with rhododendrons and other evergreens; the centre one having a sort of Swiss chalet built on it, to which, on skating occasions, the elders of the party were wont to retire for the enjoyment of a good fire, and where the luncheon was generally spread.

It was an old custom that all the neighbouring families who were on visiting terms with Beechmont should have the privilege of skating on the pool, and, as all the houses were now full for the ball the next night, a very large, gay party was assembled on

the ice when Iris and Eve made their appearance.

Mrs. Furnivall had brought her party from Rookwood, and was comfortably established with other matrons by the chalet fire. Laurence came forward at once to greet Iris, and showed himself most devoted in putting on her skates, and paying her every attention. To Eve he accorded but the curtest of greetings. She noticed this of course, but she was amply occupied by responding to the greetings which assailed her on all sides, as well from former London friends as from neighbours desirous of congratulating her on her recovery.

From the moment they came in sight of the pool, she had seen Claud Urban, and had felt that he was watching her, and when, as she greeted Lady Hildegarde, the latter introduced him, she could hardly raise her eyes.

Gradually the groups dispersed, and before very long Mr. Urban and Eve found them-

selves out of earshot, as they started together to one extremity of the pool.

“At last, my little Eve!”

“Oh, Claud! I did so wonder if you would come!”

“Small doubt of that, when you asked me.”

“But—before you seemed so anxious that no one here should see you.”

“Because matters were different. Eve, you are a trustful, confiding little thing; but don’t you want to know the explanation of—of what occurred the last time we met?”

“Of course, or I should not have gone to London to meet you.”

“Ah, my poor little birdie, how sorry I was about that! I never went to the club till three o’clock, as I told you in my letter, and, though I flew off at once, of course you were gone.”

“I never saw your letter, you know.”

“No, I know. When I got yours, I asked for one under the name of Esmond, and got

it all right. So nothing would induce your mother to relent, if she knew who I was?"

"No; and oh, she is so hard! She must not know! But it is quite safe as Lord Rootley is away."

"Still, as this is our first acquaintance, we mustn't stay down here too long. I see your future brother-in-law looking at me suspiciously already."

"Laurence? Ah, I have something to tell you about him. Perhaps I had better go and take a turn with him, now Iris is talking to Lady Imogene."

Just as Eve reached Laurence's side, Lady Hildegarde came up to her.

"I say, Eve, we want you for a quadrille with steps, as we did last winter, don't you remember, down at Oak Court? You dance with Bob Hamett. I think it'll rather astonish the natives."

Nothing would have pleased Eve better than to exhibit her agility and proficiency,

but mindful of what Laurence had said the day before, and the promise she had given him, she hesitated.

"I'm afraid I'm hardly up to it, Hildegarde. I suppose I'm not quite strong yet, and mummy said I must be sure not to tire myself."

"Oh, very well! I must find somebody else. I thought you'd like the fun;" and Lady Hildegarde skated off in search of recruits.

"Are you tired? Do you want to rest?" asked Laurence, anxiously.

"Oh no! I'm not a bit tired, only—you know what you said yesterday—I thought you would rather I didn't."

"Dear little Eve!"

"Doesn't Iris look well in that violet velvet and fur? It just suits her."

"Yes, very," with a marked want of interest. "I say, who was that fellow you were skating with just now?"

"A Mr. Urban I think Hildegarde said."

"He seemed to have a great deal to say to you. You were down at the end of the pool for ages."

"People often have a good deal to say to me," said Eve, mischievously ; then, in a softer tone, "I don't suppose he skates very well—he seemed to like to keep out of the crowd."

"Come for one good spin with me, Eve," and away they flew.

"Mr. Furnivall and your sister make a good race of it," said Lady Imogene, looking after them.

"Yes, I am so glad Laurence is so kind to her. I was vexed at one time because he never took the slightest notice of her."

"Let me introduce you to mamma," said Eve, as Mrs. Pleydell made her appearance shortly after luncheon, and Mr. Urban found himself bowing to the lady who had informed him that she would never allow her daughter to see or speak to him again.

He sat down by her and made himself ex-

ceedingly agreeable for a short time, and then challenged Eve to another expedition to the end of the pool.

“Do not let her do too much,” said Mrs. Pleydell; “she has been very ill, and ought not to overtire herself.”

“She has done very little as yet, have you, Miss Pleydell? There were great lamentations at your defection from the quadrille party.”

“I am not a bit tired, mummy,” said Eve, looking her very brightest, and off she flew with her companion, who seemed to Mrs. Pleydell far pleasanter and less inane than the general run of Eve’s favourite partners.”

“Now,” said Eve, when they were well out of earshot, “tell me all you have to say—all about that day.”

“I will tell you something else first. The future brother-in-law has begun to find out that he has made a mistake—he is in love with you, Eve.”

“I said I had something to tell you about

him; but that will do afterwards. Now for your story."

"It is not a long one, Eve, but very sad. The lady you saw was my sister."

"Your sister! Then why did she say——"

"That she was my wife? That makes the story. She married our cousin, Claud Esmond, who died two years ago. His loss, and that of her only child, who died suddenly a fortnight after its father, completely upset her reason. For a year she was under restraint, but this spring it was considered that she was well enough to return home, provided, of course, that some supervision was exercised over her. She came to live with me in London, her maid being a person specially recommended by the doctor. She seemed perfectly rational excepting upon one point: she persisted in believing that I was her husband. I must tell you that a very remarkable likeness existed between my cousin and myself—it was a common occurrence for even our intimate friends to speak to us for each other. After she had been with me some

little time, I thought that perhaps country quiet might be better for her than the bustle of London, and after looking at various places I decided on Sir John Dibbleton's cottage. You will wonder why I did not take it in my own name. Well, it really was to avoid gossip. I know what a story is in the country, and I thought that the mere fact of Mr. Urban and Mrs. Esmond inhabiting a cottage together would be quite enough to set tongues wagging. I did not wish the real story known, for I hoped she would entirely recover, and was anxious as few persons as possible should be cognisant of it. It was after we came here that she developed an extraordinary jealousy, and could hardly bear me out of her sight. Still persisting that I was her husband, she once upbraided me fiercely for my meeting with you which she witnessed, and, as you know, she followed me from London, having contrived to elude her maid's watchfulness."

"Poor thing! it is very sad. And where is she now?"

“In the family of a doctor with whom I am well acquainted. She is well and harmless, but she is hopelessly insane; he assures me there is no chance of her recovery. Now, Eve, you see it would have been a long story to write.”

“Yes, indeed.”

“And now tell me what you have to say about the brother-in-law?”

“Well, you know he told Iris how he had seen us wishing each other good-bye?”

“Yes, I know.”

“Well, she pitched into me awfully, as I told you; but I pacified her, and she promised not to tell. She said it was to spare mummy, and all that—of course I knew it wasn’t for me, she can’t bear me.”

“Not bear you! Why not?”

“Oh, because she was used to being the only one at home, and—she’s an old maid, and doesn’t like being put out, and her Skye hates my Maltese, and—a thousand things. Well, when they got home, and I was missing, what

must she do but run up to my room and look into my blotting-book—can you fancy anything so mean?—and then came running down to tell mummy about the note I wrote you to meet me, and all that Laurence had told her. As if she hadn't promised! You can't think how mummy scolded and bullied me, both when she found me with Aunt Louisa in London and afterwards when I was beginning to get well. I wonder I was not worried to death! And I owe it all to Iris and Laurence. And I'm determined to be revenged."

"I begin to see. You mean to make the handsome but bucolic brother-in-law in love with you—there you have already succeeded—and make Miss Netherleigh wild with jealousy. I do not as yet see symptoms of that."

"She only came home last night. But she is so proud and cold she would never see anything of the sort. No, I shan't be satisfied unless I break off the marriage. She will feel that."

"I should think she probably might. And the brother-in-law?"

"I will make him tell me he loves me, I will let him think he may hope, and then—I will laugh at him."

"Eve, you are a veritable little demon! Let the bucolic swain alone, and devote yourself to me."

"No, Claud, I *will* do this! I only told you that you might understand—that you might not think——"

"That you were really deserting me. But I don't like it—you've made him very uncomfortable already. Let him be."

"No, no, Claud, I can't! I tell you it's the only way I can punish her—and if you knew all she made me suffer! And after she'd promised, too!"

"Well, little Eve, I suppose, like most women, you'll end in going your own way. Don't go too far, though, I warn you. I shall be a demon of jealousy."

"Nonsense; *you* couldn't be jealous of

him. Besides, you know what it means."

"Yes—and by-the-by, as we are by way of unravelling to each other the cobwebs of our diplomacy, I may as well tell you something. Do you know that I am invited here as an adorer of Lady Hildegarde's?"

"Of Hildegarde's! You! But——"

"But I am not one—precisely. I flirted with her—no, accurately I should say she flirted with me, for I was a passive agent, at the beginning of the season. Lady Beechmont welcomed me as an eligible suitor, and overwhelmed me with invitations to come to them when and where I chose, so when I got your note there was no difficulty. I had a warm welcome yesterday—from mamma."

"And Hildegarde?"

"I fancy wishes me at Jericho, and is infinitely more interested in a young man with fair hair and an eyeglass, whom, I think, I understood to be quartered at Bannerton."

"Oh! Captain Deverell."

"Very probably; it is a matter of perfect

indifference to me, only, you see, I must occasionally seem to be carrying out the *rôle* which my hostess intended for me."

"I see. Well, we understand each other."

"Yes; but mind, Eve, I can't have you go too far. You belong to *me*, you know."

"Yes, yes, Claud, of course; but there is not much time to lose, and I must do it my own way."

"Well, a wilful woman, I suppose, must have her way, and vengeance is sweet, especially to your sex. I think your mother is beckoning to you; are you to be carried away captive?"

Mrs. Pleydell was going home, and thought Eve had had quite as much exercise as was good for her. She was rather surprised at the girl's quietness as they walked home, for after any gaiety her chatter was generally irrepressible.

Laurence walked home with them, but he was of course by Iris's side, and he watched Eve too closely to prove an amusing com-

panion. Iris noticed his abstraction, but naturally did not ascribe it to the right cause; she thought he was vexed about some estate business, and only wished he would talk it over with her. She had the usual feminine belief that a trouble shared is a trouble halved.

At dinner that night Mr. Urban strove to make a favourable impression on both Mrs. Pleydell and Iris, and succeeded, as he generally did when he cared to take the trouble. He was not interested in Iris: he did not care for women of an intellectual type, but preferred gay, pretty butterflies like Eve, or fast, amusing girls like Lady Hildegarde, who gave him no trouble, and exacted no mental effort. He regarded women as playthings, and greatly objected to their having "views" on the serious topics of life.

But, by the manner in which he talked to Mrs. Pleydell, she obtained no idea of this, and almost wondered that a giddy child like Eve should have so evidently attracted so superior a man.

Laurence being absent, Eve had nothing to distract her attention from Claud, and her mother observed with surprise that she received his advances with pleasure, and allowed him to devote himself to her during the greater part of the evening.

Since her daughter's escapade with Mr. Esmond, Mrs. Pleydell had not been able to disguise from herself that it would be a decided relief to feel that Eve was safely married to some one steady and suitable, even though she considered her to be terribly young and childish for matrimony; and, though she did not yet regard Mr. Urban in the light of a possible son-in-law, she was yet pleased to see Eve contented to sit and talk to anyone who conversed so sensibly, instead of forming one of the noisy group that surrounded Lady Hildegarde in the billiard-room.

The next day was again spent on the ice, Eve dividing her favours very evenly between Claud and Laurence. Two or three of the *chaperons*, who, being passive spectators, of

course saw most of what was going on, wondered that Mr. Furnivall should so often leave Miss Netherleigh for her sister; but Iris had never a thought of jealousy, and was as well satisfied of Laurence's love for her as of her own for him: it was a matter on which it never occurred to her to feel a doubt.

But that evening, at the ball, she could not help remarking that, except one or two dances with herself, Laurence danced with no one but Eve, and that, when he was not dancing, he leant against the wall, watching her sister with a very gloomy expression.

Lacking, of course, the right clue, she imagined that he must know something to Mr. Urban's disadvantage, for it seemed to be chiefly when Eve was dancing with him that he watched her: if he did, it would be better to know it at once, for he certainly was paying her immense attention. So, when she next danced with him, she said,

“Laurence, I notice you watch Eve and that

Mr. Urban very much. Do you know anything about him?"

"Only that he is a conceited, impudent puppy!"

"Oh, I don't think that. He made himself very agreeable last night, and mamma thought him quite above the average."

"What business has he to dance with Eve so much, I should like to know?"

"Because they both like it, I suppose. Then you don't know anything against him? I was afraid, by your face, you did."

"I never saw him before yesterday."

Iris was satisfied, and began some other topic, but Laurence hardly responded satisfactorily. He could not keep himself from watching Eve, and yet all the time he was telling himself that he was a fool, and that it was no affair of his.

He tried to respond to Iris's remarks, but was conscious that he acquitted himself but ill; he could not take his eyes or his mind

from Eve and her companion. But still not the shadow of a suspicion entered Iris's mind: she only tried another topic.

"I suppose you will all come over for the skating *fête* to-morrow night? I do hope it will be fine! What a very pretty sight it will be!"

"What is it? I had not heard of it."

"The pool is to be lit up, coloured lamps hung from the trees, and we are to have the regimental band from Bannerton, and, after skating, to come in here to supper. It will be quite a novelty."

"Yes, I suppose we shall all come."

"But you will like it, won't you, Laurence?" said Iris, disappointed at his tone.

"Like it!—oh, yes, I suppose so."

Evidently he was not himself to-night, Iris thought. Perhaps he was not well, perhaps he was tired, and did not like to say so; perhaps he had mysterious worries connected with "business." Well, in less than three weeks it would be her right to share all his troubles,

and to smooth his path in so far as in her lay.

Mrs. Furnivall, who was glistening in all the glory of the family diamonds, presumably for the last time, watched her son attentively, and was persuaded that there was something the matter, though what it was she could not understand. It was evidently nothing on Iris's side, for her manner to him was precisely what it always was. Even to Mrs. Furnivall the idea never occurred of his caring for Eve.

The illumination of the pool the succeeding night was a great success. Whatever Lady Beechmont undertook in the way of entertainment was always sure to be thoroughly well carried out. Chains of coloured lamps hung from tree to tree all round the pool, and clusters of them on the islands seemed as if the rhododendrons had suddenly burst into flower, while a bonfire at one end, and a multiplicity of torches, lit up the scene sufficiently, while throwing weird shadows in every direction.

Eve was almost monopolised by Claud Urban. He, with the rest of the Beechmont party, was to leave the ensuing day, as Lady Beechmont and Lady Hildegarde were starting on a tour of visits comprising a series of county balls.

“Well, Eve, this is all very charming, but when and how am I to see you again?”

“I believe mummy talks of going to London after Easter.”

“And this is New Year’s Day. It is an eternity!”

“Yes, but what can I do? I’m sure I don’t want to stay here.”

“Your ingenuity must contrive something.”

“I wish it would.”

“How are your designs on the bucolic brother-in-law prospering? His *fiancée* suspects nothing. She looks serenely satisfied.”

“I don’t know, I shall see. There are three

weeks yet," said Eve, hurriedly. "Hush! Surely some one is behind that bush!"

"Come round and see. No, not a creature. But, Eve, my own little Eve, I shall not see you after to-night, and we must have our parting now. One kiss, my sweet one," and he pressed her fondly in his arms. They skated out into the open part of the pool, and joined a merry group where Mr. Urban was at once claimed as a partner in the Lancers by Lady Hildegarde.

Laurence came up to Eve, and, almost before she knew where she was, swept her away with him to the farther end of the pool. He stopped in the shadow of the smallest island.

"Eve," he said, and his voice shook so that she hardly knew it—"Eve, tell me I am mistaken, that that man did not kiss you just now!"

"Kiss me? What man? What do you mean?" asked Eve, innocently.

She was calculating what effect his having

seen her parting with Claud would have; whether it would disgust him and overthrow her scheme, or whether it would work for her in arousing his jealousy.

“Eve, don’t pretend to misunderstand me. I *feel* he kissed you, that conceited puppy who was doing his best to make you ridiculous last night? What do you know of him? What right has he to——”

“What right have you to ask?” said Eve, composedly. “What business can it be of yours, even supposing he did? If it were Iris, indeed, you might——”

“Hang Iris!” Laurence broke forth. “Eve, it is *you* that I love, that I adore! Heaven knows I have struggled against my love, struggled hard to keep my word, though cursing the blindness that had bound me to her instead of to you. But I can bear it no longer. And, Eve, I believe you love me. Is it not so, darling? You *must* have felt how I loved you all through those drives we had together. And you have been so different, so gentle and win-

ning—surely, Eve, it must mean that you love me. Say it does, darling, say so!”

“But—but Iris,” said Eve, hanging back—
“you are *engaged* to her.”

“She will release me when she knows that our life must be one of misery. Even if she did not I would refuse. Eve, I will only marry you! In pity tell me that you love me.”

“Laurence!”

It was said in a very tender tone, and she glanced up at him with her great blue eyes. He caught her in his arms.

“My darling!” he said, “you are my very own, Eve, are you not?”

Eve did not speak, but she lay passive in his arms.

At that moment “God Save the Queen” began; it was the signal for leaving the ice for the house. As they emerged from behind the island they came face to face with Iris.

“I have involuntarily overheard your con-

versation," she said, quietly. " You are quite right, Mr. Furnivall, I have great pleasure in releasing you from your engagement."

CHAPTER II.

Alas ! I have no words to tell my grief ;
 To vent my sorrow would be some relief ;
 Light sufferings give us leisure to complain ;
 We groan, but cannot speak, in greater pain.

Palamon and Arcite. DRYDEN.

IRIS NETHERLEIGH never in after-days could imagine how she contrived to spend the remainder of that evening in society and appear as usual. It was not that she was unhappy—that was all to come—but that she was indignant.

Iris, as we have said, was very proud, and such a blow as her lover's defection roused her spirit, and made her feel as if she never had,

never could have, cared for him. She felt as if her feelings must be patent to everyone, legibly written on her countenance, and would have been incredulous if told that the only difference in her was that her manner had, if possible, more than its usual stately calm.

Those who knew her well had, of course, left her unappropriated for Laurence to take in to supper, and she felt a debt of gratitude to Mr. Urban, who, shrewdly guessing that something was amiss, stepped forward and offered her his arm. Captain Deverell was escorting Eve, and Laurence found himself obliged to take Lady Hildegarde, and was unmercifully rallied by her on his silence and dulness.

The supper was purgatory to him as well as to Iris; he could not help knowing that he had behaved very ill, and the thought hurt his pride, while his self-satisfaction had been cruelly wounded by the cool and contemptuous tone in which she had said: "I have great pleasure in releasing you from your engagement."

He looked at her as she sat responding calmly and apparently without an effort to Mr. Urban's lively conversation, and at once decided that if she had ever loved him she could not possibly look so unconcerned. This was an additional mortification. He did not actually confess to himself that he wished Iris to be made miserable by his desertion, but still that she should take it with cool equanimity and not seem to care, was very wounding to his self-love. It was no wonder that Lady Hildegarde voted him stupid, and soon turned her attention to her other neighbour.

Eve in the meantime was in the highest spirits, and Captain Deverell, who had never seen her so brilliant and amusing, almost repented the time he had spent in worshipping at Lady Hildegarde's shrine.

It was with extreme regret that she saw Lady Beechmont at length make a move; it would, she knew, be the signal for departure, she would not see Claud again, and now that the deed was done, and the breach made be-

tween Laurence and Iris, she began to be a little alarmed at the prospect before her. How angry her mother would be! and how increasingly disagreeable her life at home would be made! Mr. Urban joined her in the hall as the ladies were seeking their various wraps.

"It is good-bye, my darling," he whispered. "When shall I see you again, I wonder? Write if you can."

"Of course. Oh! Claud, I've done it! Iris heard him say something to me, and she stepped forward; she had been listening behind the rhododendrons, mean thing! and said she had great pleasure in releasing him from his engagement!"

"And now, of course, he'll propose to you?"

"I suppose so. Oh! Claud, what a fuss there will be at home, and how angry mummy will be!"

"I daresay. Indeed, Eve, I can't wonder. You know it *is* very wicked of you."

"Don't *you* say it's wicked, you know why I did it; they made mischief. Oh! Claud, I wish you were going to stay."

"So do I."

"There's mummy calling; I must go," and, with a warm pressure of the hand, they parted.

Iris spoke not a word during their drive home, and Eve was unusually silent. Mrs. Pleydell concluded they were tired, and, being herself sleepy, was not sorry to be quiet. Iris had resolved to say nothing to her mother that night. It would, she knew, distress her greatly, and she would not disturb her when she was tired.

Eve, who had anticipated vehement reproaches the instant they were in the carriage, was amazed to find that Iris wished her good night as usual, and shut herself into her own room without enlightening her mother as to what had occurred. Was it possible that she did not care? It would make matters less disagreeable, but still it would be a bitter dis-

appointment. She had wanted to punish her even more than Laurence.

If Eve could have looked into her sister's room that night, her malice might have been amply satisfied, she might even have been moved to pity. Iris never thought of going to bed, or even of undressing. She sat in the arm-chair by the fire, where she had at first seated herself, unconscious of the flight of time.

Now that she was alone, it was not only the blow to her pride that she felt, it was the agony of her slighted love. Little suited as they really were in every way, she loved Laurence very dearly, and it was a bitter blow to feel that he had ceased to care for her, and had turned to another, and that other her own sister.

That it should be Eve he preferred filled her with amazement. He had seemed at one time almost to dislike her, had said sharp things about her fast, flirting manner and pert speeches, and had positively avoided

her. Then, too, was it not he who had told her of the affectionate farewell which he had himself witnessed between Eve and Mr. Esmond? It seemed absolutely inconceivable, and yet her own ears had left her no doubt that it was true, and, as the thought of her future life without the love she so prized came over her, Iris covered her face with her hands, and wept as if her heart would break.

She was aroused at length by the cold. The fire was almost out, and the grey dawn just beginning to show through the blinds. Iris roused herself with an effort, raked the embers together, and put on some coal, then walked to the window, and drew up the blind. It was a dismal scene. The river ran black and cold between its snowy banks; the evergreens and creepers bent beneath their load; a leaden sky lowered over all, and some large flakes of snow were beginning to fall.

Iris turned away with a shudder. Such a

dismal day seemed a fitting beginning of her wrecked life.

As soon as her mother was awake she would go to her, and tell her, but not even to her would she reveal her misery. It would only give her needless pain, and that she would feel it bitterly she well knew.

Gradually she heard sounds of life begin in the house, and at length the tap that told that Rogers was taking Mrs. Pleydell her morning cup of tea. She waited till the maid was gone, and then entered her mother's room. Mrs. Pleydell started up.

"Iris, my child, what is it?"

The girl's face of proud misery, her unchanged dress, the black circles under her eyes, revealed something much amiss.

"I have something to tell you, mamma. Everything is at an end between me and Lau—Mr. Furnivall."

"Iris! what do you mean?"

"He no longer cares for me. He loves some one else."

"You do not mean that he told you so?"

"No—but he told her. Oh, mother, I could not help it—it was by the small island. Before I could move, I had heard enough to tell me I was entitled to hear all."

"You are sure you did not misunderstand?"

"Misunderstand! No, mamma, it was clear enough."

"My poor, poor darling!"

"Don't pity me, please, mamma"—this with a choke in her voice that made her mother's heart ache. "If, as it seems, he has changed his mind on such a subject, he is not a person to be regretted. It—it might have been worse—it might have come later——"

"I am thankful you can take it so, Iris. Of course it is the only right way to look at it—but—but——"

"But"—with a ghastly effort at a smile—"you think I am rather cold, mamma. Per-

haps I am, but I think it is something to be thankful for."

"My darling, I never thought you cold!"

There was a pause. Iris was half lying on the bed beside her mother, whose arm was round her. Mrs. Pleydell's tears were flowing fast.

"Don't cry, mother," said Iris, kissing her. "After all, you know, he is not worthy of a regret."

"Can you bear to tell me what you heard, and—and how you heard it?"

"I had been skating for a little very fast with Colonel Brandon, and wanted to rest. We stopped just behind the small island, where it was quite sheltered from the wind. As we were waiting there we saw Nellie Minchenden fall, and, as her brother did not seem very expert, I begged Colonel Brandon to go and help her. In a moment I heard voices the other side of the island. The first words I heard were: 'What business can it be of yours? If it were Iris——'

‘Hang Iris!’ That paralysed me, or I should have called out. And then he went on how he loved her, and how he had struggled against it, but without success, and that he was *sure* she loved him. Oh! mamma, perhaps it was very wrong, but I *could* not help listening! Then she said, in a hesitating voice, ‘But—but Iris—you are engaged to her!’ And he said, ‘Oh! she will release me. If she did not I would refuse. In pity tell me you love me!’ Then she only said ‘Laurence!’ and I heard him kiss her, and call her his darling. Then ‘God save the Queen’ struck up, and I went to meet them round the end of the island, and I said quite quietly, ‘You are quite right, Mr. Furnivall, I have great pleasure in releasing you from your engagement.’ Then Colonel Brandon came up and began to talk to me about ‘Patience,’ and I was so glad I had not seen it, because it gave him so much more to talk about, and—I don’t much remember anything afterwards.”

“My darling!” said her mother, “it is well

indeed that you know this in time. But tell me, who is it that has supplanted you?"

"Oh! mamma, did I not tell you? It is Eve!"

"Eve!" exclaimed her mother, almost with a scream. "Iris, are you *sure* you are not dreaming? Why, it is not four months since Laurence himself told you of her meeting with Mr. Esmond! He knows of her going to London to meet him! My child, you *must* be mistaken! It is absolutely impossible."

"But quite true, mamma. I heard him call her Eve, I heard her answer, and, if that were not enough, I met them together when I spoke to him."

"It is past belief!" said Mrs. Pleydell. "I always thought he almost disliked her—that she had offended him by her pertness when she first came home. I thought it was so excessively kind of him to take her out as he did when I was knocked up. I suppose this accounts for the visit to Cockleton which sur-

prised me so much. Wicked, heartless child !
What did she say to him, Iris ?”

“Only what I told you.”

“But you are sure she let him kiss her ?”

“Oh ! yes, more than once.”

“Iris, indeed a man who is capable of deserting you within a month of your marriage for such a girl as Eve is no loss. Of course, darling, you feel it deeply, and hate all the gossip it must necessarily create, but call your pride to your aid, dear, and reflect that his is a character beneath your contempt. Neither your Aunt Rachel nor I ever thought him well suited for you ; we thought you worthy of a far higher character, but we never dreamt of such baseness as this.”

“Don’t abuse him, mother,” said Iris, with a stifled sob.

“My darling, how can I help it ? How can you expect me not to regard him with contempt ? My child, you will soon do so your-

self. You have plenty of pride, Iris—you will not waste regrets on a man who could desert you and prefer Eve.”

“Regret him! No!” said Iris, trying hard to steel herself in pride, and to harden her heart against the thought of Laurence. She was determined not to break down, and show her mother how miserable she was. It would do her no good, and would only make her dearest mother miserable. “But—I can’t help thinking of the nine days’ wonder—of what people will say.”

“I know. I think we will go abroad for a little, and then to London. I had always intended to go after Easter.”

“Yes, but—mother, you forget—it is—Eve he wants to marry.”

“My dear, I can’t hear of it! I am glad—thankful—that you have been spared from marrying a man capable of what he has done—he could never have made you happy. My darling, I trust some one infinitely better is in store for you. But desert you

and marry Eve! No, it is not to be thought of!”

“But, mamma, if they really love each other.”

“Iris, do you honestly believe that Eve has it in her to love anyone but herself? As for *his* feelings, I am not likely to consider them. But Eve! It is not three months since she sobbed as if her heart would break about Mr. Esmond, and I suppose she must have fancied she cared about him, or she would not have gone off to London to meet him. How can we ever be sufficiently thankful that he did not get her letter in time? And I am sure the last three days I have thought there must be something between her and that remarkably pleasant Mr. Urban. How is one to understand such a weathercock?”

“I noticed,” said Iris, in a low, pained voice, “that at the ball Laur—Mr. Furnivall only danced with me and Eve, and he watched her in such a peculiar way that I asked him if he knew anything about Mr. Urban. He said,

‘only that he was a conceited puppy.’ I suppose now he was—jealous.”

“You do not regret, Iris, that on the spur of the moment you spoke to him as you did?”

“Regret it! It was easier to speak then than later; it required less explanation.”

“Forgive me for asking, darling—I only meant—if he had said nothing—you would still have broken it off.”

“Mamma!”

“Don’t be shocked at me, Iris—many girls would not. I felt sure you would.”

Iris lay silent. It seemed to her as if years had passed since she had started for Beechmont the night before—as if she were old, and hard, and withered. Mrs. Pleydell stroked her cheek.

“You do not want to see him when he comes here, as I suppose he will.”

“See him!—no!” and Iris shuddered—“that is, unless you think I ought.”

“Certainly not; only I would not have

opposed it if you wished it. There, my darling, you are white, and cold, and miserable; you have had a great deal of fatigue, and a night of wretchedness. Do not attempt to come down to-day: go to your room, have a warm bath, and go to bed."

"Mamma, I could not sleep. It would be worse to—to lie still thinking than to be downstairs reading and doing something."

"Do as I ask you, darling. You are more worn out than you know yourself. Take off your things, so that Rogers may not notice you have been up all night, and, when she answers your bell, tell her you want a really hot bath. I will bring you something afterwards that will soothe you."

Fortified by a fervent kiss, Iris stole away to do her mother's bidding.

The mother and daughter understood each other well. Mrs. Pleydell knew, as well as if it had been told her with sobs and groans, the agony of disappointed love that her child was enduring, but she realised that by the slightest

allusion to it she should add weight to the heavy burden that had to be borne. To have touched on her disappointed love would have seemed to Iris like pity, and that her sensitive pride could not bear even from her own mother—yet.

All this Mrs. Pleydell understood perfectly, and Iris felt that she did, and was grateful to her for sparing her feelings: she knew the heartfelt sympathy was there, but was thankful that it was not expressed.

When Iris left her, Mrs. Pleydell lay musing on what she had heard. Her heart ached for her child, but still there was one consolation in the fact that there was no uncertainty: Iris knew the worst, and had promptly taken the only action that was possible. Her mother hoped that her pride would prove an assistance to her; it must surely help her to cast out all love for a man who, within three weeks of their marriage, could desert her for another.

But the pride, if an assistance in one direc-

tion, increased the trial in another. Mrs. Pleydell groaned as she thought of the agony it would be to Iris to know of the gossip which such an event could not fail to produce in a country neighbourhood.

How soon could they go abroad? It might seem very cowardly to fly from gossip, but anything would be better than that Iris should be wounded by artful questions or painful allusions, or than that she should shut herself up to brood at home for fear of encountering such inevitable disagreeables. She had expressed a wish to go to Rome—it should be gratified. This was Friday: they could quite well start on Wednesday, and with this determination she rose and began to dress.

Of course, she thought, Laurence would come to her that morning; she must compose herself before the interview, or else she should say more than was at all judicious. And then there was Eve. That anyone could possibly prefer her to Iris passed her mother's comprehension, but that anyone engaged to the elder

sister, and knowing all her perfections, could deliberately turn from her and profess to be wildly enamoured of the younger, seemed really little short of a miracle.

As soon as she was dressed, she went into Iris's room. The girl was in bed, but as soon as her mother appeared she said,

"I don't think, mamma, there is the least chance of my being able to go to sleep. I would so much rather get up and do something than lie here and think."

"Lie still, dear, and drink this," said her mother, giving her a glass of milk, in which some chloral was mixed. "I will shut the shutters, and you will soon be asleep. I have decided, dear, that we will start for Rome on Wednesday. I shall insist on his keeping the secret till then, so we shall be gone before there is any gossip or wondering."

"Oh, mamma, how good of you!" said Iris.

Already the potion was beginning to work, and her voice sounded dreamy. Mrs. Pleydell

closed the shutters, placed a screen so that the firelight should not fall on her eyes, kissed her fondly, and softly left the room, pausing in the passage to give Rogers orders to prevent any noise that could possibly wake Miss Netherleigh.

When she entered the breakfast-room Eve started up.

"Mummy, how late you are! Fancy my being down before either you or Iris!"

"I think, Eve, you must know very well what has detained me—I have been with Iris."

"Is anything the matter?" asked Eve, innocently; "has she got a headache?"

"Eve, where is the use of pretending you do not understand? You are no fool, and you must be perfectly well aware that I know what passed between you, Mr. Furnivall, and Iris last night."

"I never thought she would tell, that she would confess she had been listening; it was so mean of her," said Eve, colouring.

“If anyone is mean, Eve, it is you and Mr. Furnivall. Before Iris could move she had heard what fully entitled her to remain and discover how far the man to whom she was engaged meant to betray her. It is only a mercy his true character is discovered before marriage rather than after. Iris herself must soon be most thankful for what has occurred. But that you, Eve, should have allowed the man who was almost your brother-in-law to make love to you, nay, have encouraged him—for you must have done so, or this wild, wicked scheme of transferring his allegiance from Iris to you could never have entered his head—is a pitch of wickedness shocking in any woman, but quite appalling in such a child as you.”

“Now don’t be cross, mummy dear,” said Eve, coaxingly; “how in the world can I prevent men from falling in love with me?”

“Even if they are engaged to some one else?”

"Is it my fault? As to poor, dear Laurence, Iris never understood him one bit. She used to talk about books and pictures, and bore him about them, and about wanting to go to Rome, the very thought of which he hated, instead of caring about his dogs and horses and shooting, and things. He'd have been miserable with her—he said so last night."

"If he thought so, why did he not take the only manly course, and tell her so? It would have been more gentlemanlike to have done that before making love to anyone else."

"Ah! you see, he was really in love this time," said Eve, coolly. "Now, from what I can make out, he never was the least bit in love with Iris. He thought her handsome and stately, and he'd been so used to be run after, from what he says, that he was caught by the novelty of her being so cold and stand-off, and he thought she'd look grand at the head of his table, and in the family diamonds. And then

he didn't for a minute fancy she'd let him off. Rookwood is too good a thing."

"That a man who had had the privilege of knowing Iris well could imagine she cared for his place, or would have held him an unwilling captive!"

"And then when he came to know me well of course everything was changed, and it opened his eyes, and——"

"Pray," said Mrs. Pleydell, coldly, "do you pretend to be in love with him?"

"I—that is—he—I—there was Iris," stammered Eve.

She was sorely puzzled what to say. She did not want to commit herself to too much love for Laurence, lest it should prevent her mother from allowing her to see much of Claud Urban when they went to London; and yet she could not say she did not care, for fear of disgusting Laurence and losing the exquisite pleasure of refusing him and telling him she had only encouraged him for the express pur-

pose of so doing in revenge for his interfering in her affairs.

"Iris! I imagine you did not think much of her. However, I hope your fancy for Mr. Furnivall may prove as evanescent as that for Mr. Esmond seems to have been, for you will see no more of him."

"But, mamma—Laurence loves me."

"Call him Mr. Furnivall whenever you must speak of him, which had better be as seldom as possible."

"But when we meet?"

"You will have no opportunity at present. We start for Rome on Wednesday."

"Oh! mamma, we can't. The hunt ball is Wednesday, and the dance at the barracks on——"

"We start for Rome on Wednesday," repeated Mrs. Pleydell, leaving the room; and Eve was left to reflect that the first result of her machinations had been to deprive herself of two balls, besides several other probable ones,

and to afford Iris the means of going to the very place she so much wanted to see. Her meditations were far from satisfactory.

CHAPTER III.

Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,
Misprising what they look on.

Much Ado about Nothing.—Act iii, Sc. 1.

WHEN Laurence awoke from a disturbed sleep the day after the Beechmont skating fête, it was with the sensation that something very unpleasant was impending. For a few moments he could not remember what it was, but almost immediately the thought of all that had happened the night before recurred to him.

It was in a certain sense a relief that Iris had heard what she did, it saved him from the extremely disagreeable task of announcing that

he could not fulfil his engagement. Now she had cancelled it herself, and there was nothing more to be said.

He supposed though he must see Mrs. Pleydell: it would be awfully disagreeable, but he supposed he could not shirk it. Of course the girls would have told her all about it, but he supposed he must go through the form of asking her consent to his engagement to Eve. He wondered if she would make any fuss. She ought not, for if, as his mother seemed to think, disgrace attended the name of Pleydell, she ought to be more glad to get Eve well married than Iris.

Why should they not be married on the day already fixed, only substituting one sister for the other? It was the very simplest thing in the world, and Eve was such a dear, reasonable little thing, she very likely would not mind going straight home to Rookwood without any nonsense of a honeymoon tour, and then he should not lose any hunting. This frost had

been bad enough, it would be too bad to lose any more.

The Dower House was quite ready for his mother : she could easily move there before the day, and then Rookwood would be quite ready for them. It was hard upon Iris of course ; he was sorry for her, very sorry, but, after all, it was her own fault. When she had him, why could she not keep him ? If she had not made herself so ridiculous with those conceited idiots at Netherleigh, and bothered him about Rome and all that nonsense which she knew he hated, and seemed to think his shooting and hunting matters of no consequence, perhaps he should never have thought of Eve.

He did not know, though—the little darling was so bewitching ; he could not understand how it was that he had ever looked at Iris after he had once seen her. She was the only creature that could ever make him happy, and then how absolutely devoted she was to him !

He would walk over to the Gate House and get his interview with Mrs. Pleydell over ; perhaps till he had done that he had better not say anything to his mother. She would be surprised, and, as he was quite aware, not well pleased ; but, after all, he was his own master, and his marriage concerned no one but himself. Still the conversation might not be a pleasant one, and it would be better to defer it till he was sure he should want Rookwood on his wedding-day. That would, he well knew, be a blow, and it was best to get everything disagreeable over at once.

Breakfast was rather late, and he was not able to start directly after, for he had to arrange the shooting-party, make what excuse he could for not accompanying them, and give his orders to the keepers. Then two of the young ladies staying in the house challenged him to a game at badminton in the gallery, which he had some difficulty in evading, and, just as he was starting, the agent stopped him on some important business.

When he had finished that it was luncheon-time, so he waited for that meal, at which his guests did not find him an amusing companion, and started immediately after through the now heavily-falling snow.

As the morning hours wore on, Mrs. Pleydell began to feel considerably surprised at Laurence's non-appearance. Surely he must come? He could never intend to let the matter rest as it was, and make no sign? She kept Eve in the drawing-room, and insisted on her reading for the appointed time, but if the girl, instead of the prescribed work, had read Sanscrit, it would have fallen on unheeding ears.

Luncheon passed almost in silence. Eve was sulky at the thought that all she had done at present was to give Iris her wish of going to Rome, and deprive herself of all the county gaieties, and her mother had plenty of food for her thoughts, and was besides desirous of making Eve feel herself in disgrace.

At about three o'clock the bell rang.

"Go to your own room, Eve, and wait there till I send for you," said Mrs. Pleydell.

"Mayn't I stay and see Laurence?" asked Eve, pouting.

It was said from sheer contrariness ; for to have seen him at present would have been rather embarrassing to her. She wanted to keep clear of meetings and promises for the present.

"Do as I tell you," said her mother, coldly, and Eve disappeared, taking care to vanish round the corner of the staircase before Laurence was admitted, though she watched him from a coign of vantage divesting himself of his ulster, and shaking the snow from his boots.

It was a shock to Laurence, who had persuaded himself that, with a very little trouble, Mrs. Pleydell would be pacified, and induced to let him marry Eve at once, that his extended hand was not taken, and the only

greeting that he received was a freezing bow.

Mrs. Pleydell waited for him to speak, and this still more disconcerted him. He had expected to be received with a storm of reproaches, and, when these were exhausted, to have explained his own views plausibly.

At length he stammered,—he found it very difficult to begin with those searching blue eyes fixed inquiringly upon him,—

“I—I suppose you have heard——”

“What?” said Mrs. Pleydell, coldly, as he hesitated.

“I mean, I suppose Iris——”

“I must remind you that my daughter’s name is Miss Netherleigh, Mr. Furnivall. Pray proceed.”

“I suppose she has told you that she—that is I—that is, you know——”

“Yes?” said Mrs. Pleydell, continuing to speak interrogatively.

She was determined not to help him in the least.

“That—that she has cancelled our engagement?”

“Do you imply that it is a caprice on her part?”

“No—I can’t say that! She heard—*overheard* what—what was not intended for her ears.”

“Something that you never intended that she should know?”

“Well, I can hardly say that.”

By this time Laurence was scarlet, and hotter than if he had been playing cricket in August. Mrs. Pleydell leant back in her chair, looking at him calmly and interrogatively.

“I must have told her that——”

“That?”

“Oh, you must know—of course they have told you that I love Eve?”

“Miss Pleydell, if you please. You have no right to mention either of my daughters by their Christian names.”

“But I love her—I mean to marry her.”

“But I intend that you shall do nothing of the kind. Is a promise of marriage, think you, so light a thing that it may be lightly tossed one day to one sister and the next to another? If my girls had had a father or brother, Mr. Furnivall, you would not have *dared* to act as you have done. You would have been *afraid*—yes, you may exclaim at the word, but I deliberately repeat it—*afraid* of the consequences. However, I am glad that such was not the case; thankful that you have shown yourself in your true colours before the irrevocable knot was tied. It has preserved my darling child from the misery of finding herself linked to a man whom, sooner or later, she must have learnt to despise.”

“Despise!”

“Yes. A high-toned nature must despise one that is cowardly and untruthful.”

“I defy you to say that either epithet applies to me,” cried Laurence, angrily.

“It was cowardly when you found that

your affections"—with a cutting emphasis—"were fixing themselves on another, not at once to apprise my daughter of the fact. It was untruthful to go on acting as her lover when, as you assert, you were 'in love' with her sister."

"Mrs. Pleydell, do you not believe me, when I say that I love Eve, and mean to marry her?"

"I confess, Mr. Furnivall, I shall never again place much confidence in your assertions. However, it is very possible that at this moment you may be what you call in love with my second daughter."

"Believe me, I am. I cannot be happy without her. Let me marry her on the 20th, instead of her sister, and we shall be as happy as the day is long."

"Your happiness, Mr. Furnivall, is a matter in which I am not in the least interested; my daughter's—even if she wished it, which I greatly doubt—I will not imperil by allowing her to unite her fate with that of anyone so

fickle as yourself. As to your marrying her on the 20th—— Well, if you are not *quite* mad, I wonder you are not struck by the indecency of the proposal.”

“Well then, later.”

“My daughter will not be nineteen till the end of this month. She is naturally under my control until she is one and twenty. Before that time arrives and she is mistress of her own actions, I declare most emphatically that she shall not marry you. Probably long before that time comes you will have forgotten her very existence.”

“Mrs. Pleydell, you are cruel. I never loved before.”

“So you doubtless told my eldest daughter—and possibly many others. As I said before, your happiness is a matter of the most perfect indifference to me.”

“Do you mean to say you forbid me to see Eve?”

“You will not have much opportunity of seeing Miss Pleydell at present. We start for

Rome on Tuesday or Wednesday, and shall be absent till the end of the summer, possibly longer."

"I must see her before she goes."

"It is very easy to say 'must,' Mr. Furnivall, but I shall not allow it."

"Then I shall write."

"That I also forbid, and shall take precautions to enforce my wishes."

"You cannot mean to separate us for two years!"

"Most emphatically I do. If your so-called love stands that test, I may perhaps believe in it. At present it seems to me that you are strangely blind to the enormity of your own conduct."

"I am sure I am very sorry to have made Ir—Miss Netherleigh so unhappy."

"Oh! pray do not imagine you have done that. Love in a mind like hers could not exist without esteem, and, as your conduct of course destroyed that, she can hardly feel unhappy. Contempt for you and dis-

like of the inevitable gossip are what she feels."

"Contempt!"

"Yes," with a surprised air: "what else did you expect she *could* feel?"

Laurence could not say that the thought of a beautiful girl weeping over his faithlessness had not been without its fascination for him, so he remained silent.

"For myself," continued Mrs. Pleydell, "I confess that I have for some time felt rather doubtful as to whether you were qualified to make my daughter happy. You seemed to have so few ideas in common with her, and to have so little appreciation of her refined and intellectual views. No doubt it is all for the best, though I am sorry the matter has ended so disgracefully for you."

Laurence rose.

"I don't think there is any more to be said. I shall speak to Eve whenever I have a chance."

“Really! Ah! there is one thing I forgot. Your ring and other presents and your letters shall be returned to-morrow. I am sorry they are not ready for you now, but Miss Netherleigh was fatigued with the ball and skating-party, and is still asleep. Of course you will return hers.”

“Of course. Mrs. Pleydell, you—you will be good to Eve? You are so awfully unkind to her and she feels it so.”

“I am afraid Miss Pleydell is apt to make somewhat random statements; I am not aware of ever having treated her otherwise than with the most perfect justice.”

“She is such a darling, and she would be so loving if you would be the least kind. She believes you dislike her.”

Mrs. Pleydell’s lip curled.

“She believes nothing of the kind. If she made you believe such nonsense, you must be credulous indeed! Good morning, Mr. Furnivall,” and she rang the bell.

The next moment he found himself in

the hall, feeling very far indeed from triumphant.

As he walked home through the drifting snow, he felt quite aghast at the treatment he had received. He had expected reproaches, tearful representation of Iris's misery at his desertion, assurances that if she died he alone would be responsible, but he had never once doubted that his own wishes would triumph, and that he should leave the Gate House the plighted husband of Eve Pleydell, even if he did not obtain his desire of being married to her at once.

And how different it had all been! There had been no reproaches as to the misery he had caused! Indeed, he had been expressly told that the only sentiment he had inspired was contempt, while he had been charged both with cowardice and untruthfulness. And the worst of it was that, angry as he felt at the accusations, he could not absolutely deny them, could not affirm that there was nothing in what Mrs. Pleydell had said. She had been so dreadfully

cool and calm, so perfectly at her ease, it was impossible to think that she was grieved at what had occurred, and it was a terrible mortification to him to find the indifference with which his defection had been received.

His cheeks tingled again as he recalled the cool scorn of Mrs. Pleydell's voice and manner when she had asked him what else he expected from Iris but contempt! Altogether he had been made to feel—indeed, he still felt—so small! And to a young man of considerable self-complacency like Laurence, this new experience was exquisitely painful.

And then the calm way in which his hopes of Eve had been quenched. But that, of course, was all nonsense. When people loved each other as they two did, it was impossible that anyone could keep them apart for two whole years.

When they came home from Rome he would go and see them in London, and by that time Mrs. Pleydell would be more reasonable, and all would be right. It was hard on his little

darling, though, that he should be obliged to let her go without a word; still if her mother was in earnest in forbidding it—and she certainly seemed to be so—there was no use in his attempting to write. He must just wait till he saw her.

He determined he would not tell his mother till the next day, when all their guests would be gone. By the way, she must put off the party that was coming for the hunt ball; he was not at all in the humour to have people staying in the house, it was bore enough to have to entertain his guests for that one evening when he had so much to think about. He should enter into no explanations, merely announce the fact, and leave her to draw her own conclusions, and he should not mention Eve. Time enough to do that when matters were a little more forward.

Mr. Furnivall's guests could hardly have found him amusing that night. He sat quite silent excepting when addressed, and even then frequently required to be spoken to a second

time. His mother saw something was very much amiss, and wondered what it was, but forbore to question him, knowing his inveterate dislike to having his moods remarked upon.

The next morning, when the last guest had departed, he went to her in her morning-room.

"Mother, I want you to put off all the people who are coming here next week."

"Put them off! My dear Laurence, why? There are two balls, and it will be a dreadful disappointment to the girls who are coming."

"Well, I can't help that."

"But, my dear Laurence, you must have some reason."

"I don't choose to have anyone here. My—my marriage with Miss Netherleigh is off, and I don't want a lot of gossiping people here."

"Your marriage off! Do you mean you are

not going to be married on the 20th?" cried his mother in astonishment. "Why is it, Laurence? What has happened?"

"I have told you the fact; isn't that enough?" returned her son, gloomily. "At any rate, it is all that I am going to say. I don't want to be asked questions, or bothered, or gossiped about, and I won't have anyone here next week."

"As you please, of course, Laurence, but you are quite wrong. Shutting yourself up will make much more gossip."

"I tell you I cannot and will not stand people in the house. If you think we must have them say so at once, and I'll go away."

Mrs. Furnivall thought for a moment, and said,

"It had better be so, I think. 'The breaking off of your engagement will be a nine days' wonder, and you would be very much better out of the way. But, Laurence, you know I don't want to tease you with questions, or to

hear anything you don't like to tell me, but you really must give me some clue what I am to say."

"Say the truth, that you know nothing except that it is all over," and Laurence walked away, deliberating where he should go to avoid his guests.

Mrs. Furnivall was very considerably perturbed. She had always steadfastly maintained to herself that Iris, though in many respects a very nice girl, was by no means worthy of or suited to Laurence. She should therefore logically have been glad that the marriage was at an end, and ultimately it was very probable that she would rejoice, but at present she was overwhelmed at the thought of all the gossip the rupture would create, and also greatly annoyed and mortified at knowing nothing whatever of the cause.

Of course it was Iris's fault, of that she did not for a moment doubt, but it was very humiliating that, when questioned on the subject, as she was of course sure to be, she should be

able to give no particulars, not even to say what had been the final cause of the rupture. And so being unable to say anything, and determined not to confess her own ignorance, Mrs. Furnivall took refuge in mysterious ejaculations and shakings of the head, which, being interpreted by each of her many interlocutors after their own fashion, resulted in a very promiscuous indictment against Iris, who happily by that time was far out of reach.

Everyone told a different story, and emphasised it by the assurance that they had heard it from Mrs. Furnivall, and the different factions quarrelled fiercely over details, and only agreed in vehemently condemning "that heartless Miss Netherleigh," and warmly sympathising with "poor dear Mrs. Furnivall."

No one ventured to repeat these rumours to Aunt Rachel, the only person outside the Gate House who really knew the whole state of the case. Old Miss Netherleigh was held in considerable awe in Bannerton, for she had a somewhat caustic tongue, and was known to

speak very plainly when those she liked were attacked. Therefore no one mentioned the current stories before her, and the one lady who ventured to remark what a very sad thing it was for poor Miss Netherleigh her marriage being broken off, only received for reply that probably it was the best thing that ever happened, and immediately constructed a theory which found ready acceptance, that Iris's engagement to some great grandee would be speedily announced.

Much mortification was felt that Laurence should have withdrawn himself from Coalshire at this juncture. Several damsels had taken to heart the old saying that "many a heart is caught in the rebound," and were quite ready to try their best to console him. No mention of Eve had ever been made, and no one had an idea that she had any connection with the affair.

As we have said, Aunt Rachel was the only person to whom Mrs. Pleydell told the whole story from beginning to end. She wrote it

after Laurence had left her, for the snow was falling too heavily to render it possible to drive into Bannerton. Then she went into Iris's room.

The girl still lay asleep, a calm, sweet repose, which rejoiced her mother's heart. This rest would calm and strengthen her beyond anything, and the next day there would be so much to do in preparing for their departure that there would be distraction for her mind.

Eve was curled up in the arm-chair in her own room fast asleep also, and Mrs. Pleydell returned to her correspondence. To Mrs. William Pleydell she said that the marriage was at an end, Mr. Furnivall having chosen to get tired of Iris, and to fancy himself in love with Eve, but she gave no particulars.

To Lady Netherleigh she said Iris had discovered, happily before it was too late, that Mr. Furnivall's affections were set on some one else, and had at once, of course, cancelled her engagement. To the other guests who were to

have come for the wedding she merely said that Iris had seen fit, for ample reason, to renounce her engagement.

All the letters finished, she summoned Rogers.

“Rogers, Miss Iris’s marriage is broken off for a very good reason. I need not tell you, the fault is not on her side, but of course, when such a thing happens, there will be gossip, and I want to get her away from it all as quickly as possible. I think of going to Rome, where Miss Iris is very anxious to go, for a month or two and then to London. Can you and Martha be ready to start Tuesday or at latest Wednesday? We can stay a day or two in London for anything we want.”

Rogers was a person of very few words.

“All shall be ready for Tuesday, ma’am.”

“Very well, then send me Simmons.”

With her housekeeper and butler, Mrs. Pleydell settled all that was to be done in her absence, and then felt that she wished the time of departure was nearer.

Iris awoke and came down to dinner. She exerted herself to talk calmly and naturally, and, though her mother saw and appreciated the effort, Eve noticed nothing unusual in her manner, and lamented bitterly to herself that she had so signally failed in inflicting the punishment she had hoped upon her.

CHAPTER IV.

Sorrow preys upon
 Its solitude, and nothing more directs it
 From its sad visions of the other world
 Than calling it at moments back to this ;
 The busy have no time for tears.

The Two Foscari. BYRON.

“ I CAN understand that you are naturally very much annoyed,” said Mrs. William Pleydell ; “ of course he behaved very ill, so near the wedding, and all that, and of course any *esclandre* of the sort always goes against a girl, still the fact remains that he is an excellent *parti*, and, as he won’t marry Iris, I cannot in the least understand why you will not let him please himself by marrying Eve.”

“Louisa ! you cannot really mean it ! Allow Eve, who requires such careful guidance, to marry a man absolutely devoid of principle !”

“I daresay he would take just as good care of her as anybody else.”

“Besides, I am by no means certain that she cares about him herself.”

“That makes a difference. It is an old story.”

“It is a very painful one. I fear it is quite clear that Eve must have given him great encouragement, which, under the circumstances, is quite inexcusable.”

“She always was a most inveterate little flirt. I don’t think she can help it ; it comes to her naturally.”

“I am sure I wish it did not.”

“I’m afraid you’re hard on the child, Grace. She tells me she has missed ever so many balls in Coalshire, and she hates the thought of going to Rome. Now, why shouldn’t you leave her with me till you come back at Easter ? Of course, at present, I couldn’t take her out, but she might see a few people.”

“No, thank you, Louisa, I know you mean it most kindly, but Eve must stay with me.”

“Well, I think it is a pity, but there is no more to be said. Tom will be sadly vexed at missing you.”

“Is he not in London?”

“No, he has gone on business into Spain. You know that Mr. Francia has taken him into partnership?”

“No—he told me that Mr. Francia had made some proposals to him, but I did not know that it went so far as a partnership. I am sure I am very glad.”

“It is only just settled. It seems Mr. Francia knew a great deal about poor Mr. Pleydell’s business and had a very high opinion of Tom, so he first offered him the position of manager, and then asked him to become a partner. There was some important business to be carried on in Spain, and so Tom went last week for a month.”

“Well! I hope it will turn out well. I mean that he will find Mr. Francia a pleasant person

to work with. Do you know much of him, Louisa."

Mrs. Pleydell asked the question in all innocence, but it evidently discomposed her sister-in-law greatly. She coloured, fidgeted, and at length rose and walked to a flower-stand, where, standing with her back to the room, she said,

"Grace, can you keep a secret?"

"Yes, of course," said Mrs. Pleydell, wonderingly; "but if it is anything you would rather not tell me, Louisa, pray do not do so. You know I am not curious."

"Everyone must know some time, but I have told no one yet, not even Tom. Oh, Grace, you can guess."

"No, indeed," said Mrs. Pleydell, somewhat bewildered.

"Not that I—that Mr. Francia has asked me—has made me promise——"

"To marry him!" exclaimed Mrs. Pleydell; "surely it is very——"

"Soon," she was going to say, but broke

off, she had no wish to say anything unpleasant.

“You are shocked,” said Mrs. William, who, now that the confession was made, had returned to her seat. “Of course it cannot be yet; and it is not like a new acquaintance. I have known him so long, before I was married even.”

“I suppose you have not seen much of him of late years, as Tom did not know him.”

“No, he has been abroad. Tom knows nothing yet, I have only told you; of course, whenever it is, it will be very, very quiet.”

“Well, Louisa, whatever you do will, I hope, be for your happiness.”

“Thank you, Grace; I know you mean it. I only wish you would spare me Eve; but I see that is hopeless. When do you start?”

“On Saturday. I think travelling will be the best thing for Iris.”

No one who met Iris would have guessed what she was enduring, the only difference in her being that she was paler and rather more

silent than usual. She was struggling to kill her love with pride, and with very fair prospect of ultimate success. But as yet love was by no means dead, and stung her fearfully in its death agonies.

Perhaps what was the hardest thing of all for her to bear was the conviction that Laurence, to whom she had given her whole heart and allegiance, had never loved her as he did Eve. Never had she heard that passionate tenderness in his voice that she had overheard that night on the pool. Probably, after all, he had never cared for her very much, and she—had given herself up to him so entirely! She was thankful that even her mother did not know this, the overflowing drop in her bitter cup.

Iris's was a proud and self-reliant nature, and any trouble that she could bear alone and in silence was to her less agonising than one for which even her mother could pity her. There was one thing that comforted her. Review her conduct how she would, there seemed

to her nothing for which she could blame herself, and it was certainly a great boon to escape self-reproach. It would be long before she could trust a man again, if indeed she could ever do so, and now her first duty was to forget what had happened ; or if, as she sadly feared, that were as yet impossible, to appear to the world, and even to her mother, as if she had done so.

She did not succeed in deceiving her mother. Mrs. Pleydell followed with tolerable accuracy all the workings of her darling's mind, her heart aching for her sore trouble ; but she knew that silence was the truest kindness, and one infinitely more appreciated by Iris than would have been the most outspoken sympathy.

When Mrs. Pleydell returned from her visit to her sister-in-law, she found, to her surprise, Mr. Urban seated with her daughters. The girls, under Rogers' escort, had been out to do some shopping, and as they reached the hotel-door on their return they encountered him. He expressed great surprise at seeing them ; it

was too cold to stand, and a few drops of rain began to fall. He asked if he might come in and see Mrs. Pleydell, the waiter saying she had returned, which, however, proved not to be the case, and he remained chatting to the two girls till she came in.

Mrs. Pleydell had thought him particularly pleasant at Beechmont; she found him even more so now. He made himself useful also, for he had spent the previous winter in Rome, and was able to give a great deal of valuable information and advice.

“It is more than probable that I shall be in Rome myself very shortly,” he said; “I mean to give myself that indulgence as soon as a small matter of business in which I am interested is settled, and I do not think it can delay me long. I shall hope to find you comfortably established when I arrive.”

He took his departure after a long visit, but almost immediately returned.

“I had quite forgotten,” he said; “I have in my pocket a ticket for a box at the St. James’s

to-night. It was sent to me this morning, and it will give me great pleasure if you will make use of it."

"Oh, mummy, do say yes!" cried Eve.

Mrs. Pleydell accepted the box, naturally expressing a hope that Mr. Urban would join them there.

During the evening he contrived to have a few words apart with Eve.

"I suppose this sudden journey is the result of your schemes?"

"Yes; but," pouting, "I never dreamt of being carried off abroad. We miss two balls this week and three next."

"That is your punishment for making mischief."

"And it has given Iris her great wish of going to Rome. I'm so sorry."

"How about the bucolic swain?"

"Oh! there was a great fuss. Mummy was very cross and scolded me awfully. He wanted to marry me at once, but she wouldn't even let him see me, and said he must wait till I

was twenty-one, for she would never consent."

"And long before that, Eve, you will have married me."

The girl cast down her eyes and blushed beneath his ardent gaze. Certainly all the love of which Eve was capable was given to this man whose acquaintance she had made in so irregular a manner, and who had been assured in writing by her unsuspecting mother that she would never suffer him to approach her daughter.

Mrs. Pleydell, turning at the moment, caught something of his impassioned gaze, and made some remark which broke up the *tête-à-tête*. What on earth was it, she wondered to herself that night, that made her silly, frivolous, heartless little daughter so universally attractive to men? It could not be her beauty, for there were plenty of girls far prettier who did not meet with a tithe of the attention. Wherein did the great attraction lie?

Mrs. Pleydell did not realize, indeed she was

probably not aware of the fact, that Eve was a past mistress in the art of flattery, and was able to make any man believe, if she chose to take the trouble, that he was everything that was delightful.

The journey to Rome was uneventful. Eve longed to stay in Paris, enjoying her two days among the shops there more than she was at all likely to enjoy any of the beauties of the eternal city. When they left it she was in the worst of humours, and made herself so disagreeable that Mrs. Pleydell cordially wished that Laurence, who evidently thought her a sweet-tempered martyr, and Tom, who regarded her as an angel, could have had the felicity of travelling with her. But then, as she reflected, remembering the gentle softness that Eve had displayed the instant that Laurence made his appearance at Cockleton, if there had been any such audience, doubtless the girl's conduct would have been utterly different.

Rome did not please Eve. Her mother and Iris wished to devote themselves to seeing it

thoroughly, and, having no special friends there, did not care to go out much. Eve wearied indescribably of the whole thing. If she had gone with a large, merry party, she would have affected to enjoy of all things the pictures, churches, and ruins. As it was, she did not feel, and would not affect, the slightest interest in anything. She always complained of being tired, sat down on the first chair looking like a martyr, and absolutely refused to look at or be interested in anything.

It was gall and wormwood to her to see how thoroughly Iris enjoyed Rome, and also she was much mortified by the expressions of fervent admiration of her sister's beauty which frequently caught her ear.

After they had been in Rome about a week, they one day, in the Vatican, encountered a gentleman who welcomed Iris with delighted surprise.

"Miss Netherleigh! This is indeed an unexpected pleasure!"

"Mamma," said Iris, "this is Mr. Thornham.

I told you how beautiful his sketches of Rome were when I was at Netherleigh."

Of course with such a well-qualified cicerone the galleries became more than ever interesting, and Eve, yawning in her self-inflicted isolation, almost wished sometimes for an earthquake that would swallow up all the "dull, stupid places" together. Mr. Thornham tried several times to interest her and draw her into the conversation, but Eve was sulky and would not be appeased, and so he devoted his attention to Iris.

The situation puzzled him considerably. He had heard from Lady Netherleigh of her engagement, and was aware that the wedding-day was fixed: he had seen Laurence twice at Netherleigh, and thought him but little worthy of such a prize—indeed such had been the general opinion, especially on the occasion of his second visit. Still she had seemed very fond of him, it was hardly likely she would have broken it off, and if he had—well, she had none of the look of a jilted or lovelorn maiden.

He refrained from anything in the guise of a question, but, writing to Lady Netherleigh about a commission with which she had intrusted him, he confided his perplexity to her and received her version of the story.

“I fancy it was a very bad case,” she wrote; “but Mrs. Pleydell said as little as possible, and I was too discreet to ask questions. I think their going abroad was a capital plan to avoid the natural gossip. She returned all her presents the day they left home. I confess I am glad she is saved from anyone so little worthy of her.”

So was Mr. Thornham. From the first moment of their acquaintance Iris had had a great fascination for him, and, now that she was free, why should he not venture to hope? Not yet of course. No true woman could at once put aside the thought of a man with whom she had been on the brink of marriage and replace him by another, but, when sufficient time had elapsed, surely there was no reason why he should despair. He had, at

any rate, in his favour the great similarity of tastes, which had certainly never existed between her and Mr. Furnivall.

In the meantime, the life was very pleasant. Nothing was more delightful to the enthusiastic artist than to exhibit all the beauties of Rome, which he loved as if they were his own, to such sympathetic and well-read women as Iris and her mother. He was quite in his element, and every day increased his admiration for Iris's mind and person.

Mrs. Pleydell guessed his feelings, but thought it best not to interfere. The interest of all she was seeing was evidently doing Iris all the good she had hoped that it would; indeed she confessed to herself that it exceeded her expectations. Mr. Thornham's company rendered their sight-seeing infinitely more entertaining than it would have been without him, and if, in the course of it, he made himself so agreeable to her child as to enable her to forget her trouble, it would be with her own entire concurrence.

Eve was, at that moment, the only annoyance her mother had, but she was a very great one. She was absolutely impracticable; would not even look at, or attempt to be interested in anything that was pointed out to her, drooped her head with the air of a martyr, professed perpetual fatigue, and, subsiding on the first chair, begged pathetically that no one would mind her—she was used to waiting. She was considerably disconcerted, however, at being taken absolutely at her word, and being left to her own reflections during the, to her, apparently interminable time that it took her mother and sister to see anything to their satisfaction.

Her delight was unfeigned when, about a fortnight after their arrival, Mr. Urban made his appearance. Eve revived at once. Mr. Urban accompanied them everywhere, and there was no more talk of fatigue, to Mrs. Pleydell's mingled amusement and disgust.

Probably he and Eve did not know or care anything about pictures, statues, or ruins, but

they wandered about, seeming to look at them, and it at any rate looked better than to see Eve perched in solitude on a chair, trying to look like Patience on a Monument. What Eve liked best was when, a little later, expeditions were made to Tivoli, Albano, and various other places. Besides, Mr. Urban knew a great many people in Rome, and introduced so many of them to Mrs. Pleydell that her first intention of going nowhere was soon abandoned.

She watched Mr. Urban very closely, and believed that she saw that he was becoming really attached to Eve. He and Mr. Thornham were old acquaintances, and the latter spoke of him as a man well known and liked. Mrs. Pleydell could not disguise from herself that it would be a great relief to her to have Eve safely married to some man who could be trusted to take care of her, and whom she really loved.

The question was would Eve ever really

love anyone? She had professed to be so miserable at being forbidden to see or write to Mr. Esmond, yet almost immediately after she had contrived to make Laurence Furnivall wildly in love with her, and must certainly have given him great encouragement, even if, as her mother firmly believed, she did not care in the least for him.

Now she was very decidedly encouraging Mr. Urban. To all appearance she was in love with him; but was such really the case? Mrs. Pleydell could not answer the question, and did not know how to find out. Eve was so perverse that to ask information of her would be worse than useless. Altogether it seemed to her there was nothing to do but to be patient, and watch the progress of events.

The constant succession of new ideas and impressions was doing more for Iris than anything else could have done. Society alone would not have been half so efficacious; it

would have distracted her mind for the time, but there would have been nothing to occupy it when in solitude.

Now the days were occupied in seeing interesting and beautiful things, and the evenings, when not passed in society, were amply filled with reading of what they had seen, or looking out references required by some train of thought which had been awakened.

It must not be imagined that Iris had forgotten her lover and her loss of him—far, indeed, from it. She still in secret shed bitter tears over her slighted love, and sometimes felt as if she could never again know happiness; but, unconsciously to herself, these sad thoughts recurred less and less frequently; her mind was so fully occupied that she was unable to brood, and almost insensibly the soreness of her trouble passed from her.

Her mother guessed that such was the case, though she carefully refrained from ever recurring to the past; but she felt deeply thankful for the pride that had so effectually helped her

child, when she heard once more Iris's low soft laugh, and saw the violet eyes sparkle with something of their old light. Had Mr. Thornham anything to do with the change? she wondered. If so, she should be glad. Iris certainly seemed to enjoy his company; but perhaps she had not as yet fathomed his meaning.

Such was, indeed, the case. Unlike Eve, Iris was not accustomed to fancy people in love with her; indeed, she thought very little about herself. She was naturally aware of her own beauty—it would have been affectation had she pretended that she was not—but, like all real beauties, she thought far less of her looks than do those whose claims to the title of beauty are uncertain.

She liked Mr. Thornham very much, and was quite conscious that he enjoyed her society; she had found at Netherleigh that he always talked to her when he could, but of anything further she had no idea. He saw that such was the case at present, and was

wise enough not to say anything that might enlighten her, but he allowed himself to hope.

It was the last week in March, and in two days Mrs. Pleydell and her daughters were to leave Rome. They intended to go home leisurely, stopping for some days at Florence, as far as which town Mr. Thornham was to accompany them. Thence they were to proceed along the Riviera, while he went on to Bologna, Ferrara, and Venice; but he hoped to be in London about the middle of May.

It had been half understood that Mr. Urban intended to escort the ladies home; something had been said about it, and Eve had no doubt whatsoever about the matter. It was therefore a great blow to her when, on a lovely morning in March, she found such was not to be the case. Eve was alone when he was announced, her mother and Iris having gone with Mr. Thornham on a second visit to the catacombs, which nothing would induce her to visit again.

"It is a rare chance to find you alone, Eve."

"Yes. Mummy watches me just as a cat does a mouse. However, I *wouldn't* go into those horrid catacombs again. I was frightened to death there the last time."

"I'm glad to have this chance of wishing you good-bye, Eve. I must leave Rome to-night."

"To-night!—leave Rome!" and Eve's face fell. "Why, I thought you were going home with us."

"So I was—so I hoped, Eve, but my Irish agent has telegraphed for me. He wants me on urgent business, and I must go. Are you very sorry, little one? You can hardly be more so than I."

"Surely you might let the business wait a little," said Eve, pouting; "a short time could not make any difference."

"I wish I could think so, dear. Eve, you *know* I want to stay; I should like of all things travelling home with you, and I thought it

would be a good time to speak to your mother. I think she likes me, Eve, and it will be all right."

"But, Claud, do you really mean you won't stay?"

"Not won't, Eve, my pet, I would if I could, but the business is of importance, and go I must. Don't be angry with me, my pet," putting his arm round her waist and turning her face up to him with one hand; "you know I wouldn't go if I could help it. I don't want to leave my pretty bird."

"And when shall you come back? Shall you be in London as soon as we are?" said Eve, beginning to be a little mollified.

"That is right! I am glad to see a smile!" kissing her fondly; "I don't know yet how long I shall be kept, but I think I am sure to be in London by the 1st of May."

"You mustn't stay away any longer."

"I shall come the very minute I can."

Eve, remember you belong to me. You are not to flirt with anyone else."

"Except Laurence. I must finish him off."

"Well, I don't like it, I wish you had left the whole thing alone. However, I don't think I need be jealous of him."

"Jealous of Laurence! You!"

"Well, I said I wasn't. But finish it off as soon as you can, and don't get into anything of the sort again."

"You are not going yet."

"I must. I have a heap of things, all left to the last of course, to do before I start."

Their farewell, which was a very tender one, lasted some time, and was very nearly broken in upon by Mrs. Pleydell and Iris, who returned the moment Mr. Urban had left.

Eve announced his defection, but she seemed so little disturbed, in fact, in such excellent spirits, that her mother suspected he must

have said something more definite, and asked quietly,

“Was that *all* he said, Eve?”

But Eve calmly responded,

“Yes—no, by-the-by, he said he should probably be in London by the 1st of May.”

CHAPTER V.

Journeys end in lovers' meeting

Every wise man's son doth know,

Twelfth Night—Act ii, Sc. 3.

AS the party, consisting of Mrs. Pleydell, her daughters, and Mr. Thornham, were strolling through the galleries of the Uffizii on the morning after their arrival in Florence, they suddenly heard an exclamation behind them, and turning, found themselves confronted by Lord Rootley.

“This is an unexpected pleasure,” said Mrs. Pleydell, after the first greetings were over; “we thought you were in the south of Spain.”

“So I was till quite lately, but it grew so very hot that I made my way to Cannes and Nice, and, not particularly liking either, I came on here. Surely you haven’t been here long.”

“We only arrived last night. And you?”

“Oh, I have been here a week, in a few days I am going to Genoa, and then slowly on to Cannes and Paris.”

“That is exactly what we are going to do.”

“Then I hope we shall be fellow-travelers.”

“It would be very pleasant. Do you know Mr. Thornham? He has been our companion from Rome, and is kindly pointing out to us the chief beauties here. He is going on to Bologna to see the Guidos.”

The two gentlemen bowed, Mr. Thornham feeling a pang of jealousy at the thought that this good-looking young man, who appeared to know Iris so well, would in all probability

have the pleasure of travelling home with her. How he wished he had never committed himself by saying he was going home by way of Bologna and Venice! He was ashamed to change now, but would very gladly have done so, could he have thought of a satisfactory excuse.

Eve's first thought at sight of Lord Rootley was that after all it was fortunate that Claud was not with them. After he had once settled matters with her mother, she thought there would be no fear of her drawing back, while, if she knew beforehand that Mr. Urban and Mr. Esmond were identical, she might refuse to have anything to say to him. It would be too dreadful, and Lord Rootley was just the sort of goody-goody young man who would think it right to tell everybody everything and make as much mischief as was possible.

This was ungrateful of her. She ought to have remembered how punctilious he had been in speaking to her alone about Mr. Esmond,

and that no one would ever have known that he had done so, if it had not been for her own incautious exclamation to Iris. But Eve was put out at having no one to pay her attention.

After the first greeting, Lord Rootley devoted himself entirely to Mrs. Pleydell and Iris, more especially to the latter, and Mr. Thornham had but little patience with Eve's provoking ways, which had been so troublesome in Rome before Mr. Urban's arrival, and was besides listening eagerly to detect whether the new-comer had any special interest for the girl he was so fast learning to love. To be neglected always made Eve cross, and it was not long before Mrs. Pleydell, glancing round, found she was missing.

"I suppose Eve has one of her fits of fatigue again," she said, with a somewhat provoked laugh, and Mr. Thornham very reluctantly volunteered to go in search.

It was not long before he found her established on a sofa, with the air of patient mar-

tyrdom with which he had become so well acquainted in Rome, and which irritated him so much.

“Miss Pleydell, your mother has sent me to beg you will join her at once.”

“I am so tired, I can’t; mummy cares for all these stupid old pictures, and could stand looking at them all day. She forgets I can’t do so much.”

“I am sorry you have grown weak again all of a sudden. You have seemed strong enough for the last two months.”

Eve coloured with vexation. She had long since found that it was quite useless to waste any of her fascinations on Mr. Thornham. She rose with a very bad grace.

“Well, if I must go I must; but I think it is very hard I couldn’t have been left to rest in peace; I should have been there all right when they came back.”

“We are going out another way.”

“But you needn’t.”

“Yes, I want to show Miss Netherleigh

something that I am sure will interest her."

"Oh, of course if it is anything for Iris it is hopeless; everything is always arranged for her pleasure."

They had now joined the others, and Eve was much mortified to find that though she was as sulky, and tried to make herself as disagreeable as possible, no one seemed to take any notice of her. Mrs. Pleydell had found that this was the best way of treating one of her daughter's fits of bad temper, and Iris was too much interested in all she saw and in the conversation of the two gentlemen, to observe that anything was amiss.

It appeared that Lord Rootley was staying at the same hotel, so he naturally joined them at the *table-d'hôte*.

"You must be pleased at Lady Imogene's marriage," said Iris, next to whom he had seated himself, Mr. Thornham to his exceeding discomfiture finding himself between Mrs. Pleydell and Eve, where his only consolation was

to listen for Iris's voice, and try to make out what she was saying, thus rendering his own answers to observations addressed to him less apposite than might have been wished.

"Yes, indeed, I was delighted; I cannot fancy two people better suited. I saw a great deal of him while I was at Beechmont. It was very provoking being ordered off just as I was beginning to know something about Coalshire."

"But it is always best to take precautions in time."

"Yes, of course, and I do believe it has done me all the good in the world. I must try to get my father to let me go to Beechmont sometimes, even if he does not."

"But do you think he will not?"

"He does not like it. He never did, and this time he seems to have done so less than usual. Then my mother fancies it disagrees with her, and Hildegarde prefers Pinefield; it is nearer London, and therefore gayer."

"I am sure no one could complain of dulness

at Beechmont this winter! Why, the house was always full."

"My mother cannot endure the country if she is left for a moment alone. They are in London now."

"Yes, I know. I found a letter from Imogene here yesterday, asking me to be bridesmaid."

"Does she say when the wedding is to be?"

"Is it possible you don't know? The 1st of June."

"I am afraid we are not a writing family. Our correspondence is of the slenderest."

"Then we have really told you some news!"

Lord Rootley was exceedingly puzzled by finding Iris still unmarried and unattended by Laurence. As he said, his family were not good correspondents, indeed Lady Imogene was the only one who wrote, and she had been so occupied by her own engagement that she had quite forgotten to tell him about Iris. When,

therefore, the next day he happened to be for a short time alone with Mrs. Pleydell, he said,

“I was so surprised yesterday to see Miss Netherleigh with you. I thought she was to have been married in January?”

“Her engagement is at an end,” said Mrs. Pleydell, with some surprise. “I thought, of course, you would have heard what naturally was a nine days’ wonder. She discovered, fortunately in time, that Mr. Furnivall preferred some one else, and at once released him.”

“I had heard nothing. I am afraid it must have been a great grief to her.”

“She has borne it nobly. I do not mean to say that she has not suffered. No woman could help doing so. But I don’t think it would be possible for her to love without esteem—hers is by no means a weak character—and also her pride forbids her to mourn for one who had deserted her. I think the change of scene has done her good.”

Lord Rootley said very little, but he was filled with astonishment. He had seen a good deal of Iris during the autumn, when she was the chief friend of his favourite sister, and he marvelled greatly at any man who had had the good fortune to win her allowing the prize to slip from his grasp.

Certainly he had wondered that her choice should have fallen on Laurence, who appeared to him a good sort of young fellow, but absolutely devoted to field sports, and quite unable to enter into any of the intellectual interests of which he soon discovered Iris had so many. If *her* eyes had been opened he would not have been so much surprised, but that she should have been rejected for another seemed inconceivable. Well, it was no business of his; it was very delightful falling in with such pleasant companions, it would render his return journey very much more agreeable, and he at once fell into the way of regarding himself as one of the party.

This was very pleasant to everyone except-

ing Mr. Thornham, who, if he had had any doubt before as to his own feelings respecting Iris, was bitterly enlightened, by his jealousy of every word she spoke to Lord Rootley, as to how much he loved her. If only, he thought despondingly, he could have had her to himself a little longer, if the pleasant time in Rome could but have lasted for another month or six weeks, perhaps then he might have dared his fate, and with some hope of success. She seemed to enjoy his society, they had many interests and pursuits in common, there seemed no reason why he should despair.

But he feared Lord Rootley; he was a younger man, very good-looking and agreeable, with the advantage of being an older acquaintance, and, owing to his own folly in having arranged to return home by a different route, he should lose all the pleasant opportunities of travel of which his rival would of course hasten to avail himself.

For Mr. Thornham was far too genuinely in love to believe that anyone, not previously en-

gaged, could fail to be fascinated by Iris, and he judged by Lord Rootley's evident pleasure in her society and appropriation of it, that he was very much in the same condition as himself.

Perhaps it was as well that they were to part at Florence. It would have been almost more than he could have borne to travel slowly home to England in their company, watching the whole time the slow and sure destruction of the hopes that had become so dear to him. For, being really very much in love, he was of course diffident of his own merits and powers of pleasing, and exaggerated all his rival's advantages.

Eve saw that he was in love with Iris, and took pleasure in saying little things respecting Lord Rootley, which she was in hopes pained and made him jealous. It was very hard to see her sister, whom she chose to consider "old and *passée*," the object of attention to the two young men of the party, while she was left unnoticed. Of course it showed their bad

taste, but it did not make the situation less dull and mortifying.

It was so hard, too, to have so utterly failed in punishing Iris. All she had succeeded in doing was in giving her nearly three months in Rome, which she had evidently greatly enjoyed, in delivering her from marrying a man who would have kept her always shut up in the dulness of Rookwood, and in possibly enabling her to marry Lord Rootley. It was too aggravating! If it had not been for her hope of refusing Laurence, and of telling him the reason why she had encouraged him, she would have been in despair.

Now, too, she felt it incumbent upon her to keep some sort of guard over her temper. She did not care what Mr. Thornham thought of her; he did not seem, from what she could gather, to go out at all in London, or to know any of her friends. His opinion of her was absolutely immaterial, as she had very soon found out that it was useless for her to try to charm him.

But Lord Rootley was different; he was in her set, and knew her friends, and might easily ruin the reputation she had always held—out of her own domestic circle—for imperturbable sweetness of temper. So, after the first day's crossness in the Uffizii, which she trusted he had been too occupied with his surprise and pleasure at meeting them to observe, she became as gentle and submissive as could be wished, and Mrs. Pleydell began to wonder whether this meant that she was trying to captivate Lord Rootley, or what was the reason of the change.

If it was any hope of fascinating Lord Rootley, there certainly did not seem much hope of its being fulfilled. He was pleasant and courteous to her, and very attentive to Mrs. Pleydell, but there never seemed an end of what he had to say to Iris. This became more evident after they left Florence, where of course the art-treasures made their topics of conversation more general.

It was not that they talked apart, or with any affectation of special confidence, but he was always consulting her and appealing to her judgment about the things that interested him; and Mrs. Pleydell, though fairly well-acquainted with her daughter's thoughts and views, was often surprised to find how much attention Iris had given to all topics of philanthropy, more especially those which aimed at aiding people to help themselves.

She and Lord Rootley seemed to think alike on most points; when they did not, he was always most patient in explaining his views, and equally ready to hear all that she had to say on her side. There was none of the impatient contempt for a woman's opinion which Laurence had manifested even on the most trivial occasions, and which had so greatly irritated Mrs. Pleydell, even though Iris had never seemed to notice it. In short, Mrs. Pleydell began to build castles in the air, and to hope that her darling child might console

herself for her disappointment by a marriage with one who seemed in every way worthy of her.

And Iris herself? Very certainly no thought of love either for Mr. Thornham or Lord Rootley had as yet entered her mind. When her heart did not ache it still felt stunned and numbed by the blow dealt by Laurence's desertion, and by the conviction that, though he had said he loved her, he had never done so with a tithe of the devotion evinced in his passionate appeal to Eve.

No thought of her own future, certainly no thought of love or marriage, had even entered her mind; if such had been suggested to her, she would probably have answered, and, as she believed, sincerely, that she should never marry.

Not because she still loved Laurence. As her mother had said, love in her nature could not exist without esteem, and when she knew that he loved another, and yet had ostensibly remained her lover, all respect for him had

died, and was replaced by contempt. If it had not been for this her sufferings would have been greater than they were, but as it was they had been severe, and it was not likely that the thought of another love should yet have occurred to her.

Eve listened with considerable anxiety to hear whether either her mother or Iris mentioned Claud Urban's name as having been with them in Rome. If they did, might not Lord Rootley, who was so fond of mischief-making and meddling, think proper to enlighten them respecting his identity with the Mr. Esmond who had spent a short time in Coalshire.

It was true he had promised her to say nothing, on condition of her promising not to meet Mr. Esmond again unknown to her mother, and he had no means of knowing that she had almost immediately broken her word. But, not being scrupulous herself, Eve never put much faith in the promises of others, and felt no certainty that he might not betray

her to Iris on the first opportunity. If Mr. Urban were not mentioned, the fact might not occur to him, and the explosion which would ensue might be averted.

And it happened as she wished. Iris had been so monopolised by Mr. Thornham as to come but little into contact with Claud, and she was besides more than ever disinclined to take any part in her sister's affairs. Even while striving to condemn Eve as little as possible for what had occurred, she could not hold her blameless; and was therefore doubly anxious to interfere in no way in her concerns.

Mrs. Pleydell's silence was caused by a different motive. She had believed herself to be sure that Mr. Urban was in love with Eve, and during the latter part of their stay in Rome had expected daily that he would propose, and, so far as she could understand Eve, that she would accept him. His sudden departure was therefore a great surprise, and she had no wish to talk about him, or say

how much they had seen of him until she saw what his future conduct might be.

It was of no use to question Eve. Her mother felt quite sure that she should be no nearer knowing what had passed in that last interview in Rome even if she did so, and was therefore obliged patiently to await the course of events. But the result was satisfactory to Eve: Claud Urban's name was not mentioned.

Soon after she arrived in Rome, Mrs. Pleydell had received a letter from Tom, telling her of his having been taken into partnership by Mr. Francia.

"It is wonderfully kind of him," he wrote. "Personally, as you know, I am quite a stranger to him, and I am quite puzzled to think how he can know so much about me as he seems to do. He quite takes away my breath sometimes by appearing to know all my thoughts and opinions on business matters. I thought no one could have known me so

well, except my father, of whom something in his manner sometimes reminds me.

“Of course this partnership in so lucrative a business will materially aid me in what, as you know, is my first object in life: clearing off every debt my father left. I told Mr. Francia honestly that such was the one goal before me, and that he must not expect me to be a partner who would spend or entertain largely, as I shall retain only £200 a year for myself, and devote everything else to clearing off the debts. I thought it was better to have this explanation, so that we might start fair, understanding each other. He shook my hand, and said my feelings did me credit, and that, though he thought most people would call me quixotic, he honoured my chivalry too much to do so.

“It was rather an odd, stilted speech, and his manner as he made it was peculiar, but I am sure he meant it kindly. He will entertain a good deal himself, I fancy, as he is looking at houses, and seems to have nearly decided on

one in Belgrave Square. He can do nothing without my step-mother's advice: he even says that her taste is so good that, when the house is found, he shall beg her to undertake all the furnishing and decoration for him, if she does not think it too much trouble.

"I cannot tell you what a disappointment it was to me, on my return from Spain, to find that I had missed you in London. I should like to have done in person what it seems so cold to do in writing: to thank you for the help you so generously gave me when the troubles came last year. Of course now I no longer need it, but I feel your kindness as much as if I had availed myself of it for many years. When you write tell me of Eve. I know, I tell myself as often as you could wish, that the object of my heart's desire is absolutely hopeless, but still the aching longing remains. As nothing can increase it, and it is beyond either your or my power to cure, tell me of her all you can, that I may picture her as she is, either grave or gay, but always charming."

It was clear from this letter that Mrs. William Pleydell had not yet taken Tom into her confidence, and his aunt was glad of it, knowing how much he would feel the slight to his father's memory of her very speedy consolation.

She wrote back, warmly congratulating him on his greatly improved prospects, and commending his wisdom in having come to a clear understanding with Mr. Francia before accepting the offer of partnership. She then proceeded :

“You ask me about Eve. You know, my dear Tom, you and I never do and never shall agree about her disposition, which you persist in seeing through such very rosy spectacles. I think, however, if you had been able to see her the first ten days here, even you must have slightly modified your opinion. She was simply impracticable, would look at nothing and would do nothing but subside on to the first chair in every gallery and complain of fatigue. Latterly, however, a Mr. Urban, with whom we

made acquaintance at Beechmont, has made his appearance, and, having some one to amuse her, she has revived and is much as usual."

The party made their way slowly homewards, pausing to admire the beauty of Spezzia, the palaces of Genoa, the gardens of Pegli, and the palms of Bordighera. They passed through Nice, not caring for its dust and bustle, and stayed but a day in the English colony of Cannes.

Eve was longing to be in Paris, and groaned at every delay as curtailing the time to be spent in the acquisition of fresh toilettes, as they were to be in London, in the house Mrs. William Pleydell had taken for them in Grosvenor Street, by the 1st of May, in time for the Drawing-room at which Iris was to be presented.

It was in Paris that Mrs. Pleydell received a letter from Tom, telling her of his step-mother's approaching marriage.

"It was a great shock to me," he wrote: "perhaps I ought to have suspected—I believe

others have done so,—but I did not, and it was a blow to me to think he was so soon forgotten and replaced. Against Mr. Francia personally I have of course nothing to say ; he is everything that is kind to me. Still, as you may imagine, I do feel it at first.”

CHAPTER VI.

Our love was like most other loves ;
 A little glow, a little shiver,
 A rose-bud, and a pair of gloves,
 And " Fly not yet " upon the river ;
 Some jealousy of some one's heir,
 Some hopes of dying broken-hearted,
 A miniature, a lock of hair,
 The usual vows,—and then we parted.
 We parted ; months and years rolled by ;
 We met again four summers after ;
 Our parting was all sob and sigh ;
 Our meeting was all mirth and laughter ;
 For in my heart's most secret cell
 There had been many other lodgers ;
 And she was not the ball-room's belle ;
 But only—Mrs. Something Rogers.

Belle of the Ball-room. PRAED.

IT was quite a new sensation to Mrs. Pleydell
 to find herself, after so many years, once

more plunged into the bustle of London life. It was a far greater whirl than she had ever before undergone, for not only had she two daughters to chaperon, but she found her own fairly large acquaintance supplemented by all the Netherleigh connection, besides a great many people to whom Lady Beechmont introduced her, and friends of Eve's who requested an introduction through Mrs. William Pleydell.

Fashion is as capricious as to types of beauty admired as about any other matter: one year the tall and stately bear away the palm, another the small and piquante are the rage, one season no one is admired who is not dark, the next blue eyes and golden hair are insisted upon as a *sine quâ non* of good looks.

When Eve was last in London, her style had been in the ascendant, and, never dreaming that taste could change, she was astonished and dismayed to find that, though still considered "a pretty little thing," it was Iris who received the lion's share of admiration, and was

emphatically pronounced *the* beauty of the season.

Miss Netherleigh was warmly solicited by Mrs. Pleydell to come up and stay in Grosvenor Street for a short time, and renew her acquaintance with all the family connections; but this Aunt Rachel declined to do.

“At my age,” she wrote, “my proper place is in my own chimney-corner or under my own cedar-tree. I know you really mean that you wish to have me, but, my dear Grace, you have quite enough on your hands without undertaking the care of your old aunt as well. Mrs. Furnivall called yesterday. She seems to think that her son has grown strangely restless; she said that he was talking of going to London for the season. I let you know this at once, as it probably may have reference to Eve, and you may like to be prepared.”

The idea that Laurence might come to London, where it was more difficult to prevent his seeing Eve than in the country, had not occurred to Mrs. Pleydell; he had always

spoken with such contempt and disgust of London society that, if she had considered the matter at all, she would have thought herself quite safe from him.

Her first thought was naturally of Iris ; she must not meet Laurence unprepared. She called her back as she was leaving the breakfast-room.

“Iris dear, I want to tell you something. I have had a letter from Aunt Rachel, and she tells me that Mr. Furnivall talks of probably spending the season in London.”

Iris flushed, and then turned pale, but she said very composedly,

“Well, London is as free to him as to us. I suppose he wants to see Eve.”

“Which I shall not allow. Iris darling, I hope his being in town will not spoil your pleasure.”

“No,” said Iris, slowly ; “I think not. I am glad to know it is likely, not to be taken by surprise, I mean. I should not like to be startled, and—perhaps blush.”

“You can meet him calmly?”

“Yes, mamma, quite. I think I have quite learnt to be thankful that he knew his own mind in time.”

This took a weight off Mrs. Pleydell's mind. She had feared that, when it came to the imminent prospect of seeing Laurence again, Iris' heart might have overpowered her pride—it was a comfort to feel that such was not the case. Her next interview was with Eve.

“Eve, I have heard that Mr. Furnivall is likely to be in London for a part of the season. Remember that you are not to dance with him if he asks you, nor to talk to him, nor let him talk to you.”

“Oh! mummy, poor Laurence! and he is in love with me, you know!”

“I wonder, Eve, you are not ashamed to refer to that, when you know how disgracefully he behaved to Iris. But remember, beyond a bow, or ‘how do you-do?’ your communication is not to go. Do you clearly understand?”

“But, mummy——”

“No buts, Eve. I have given you an express order—do you understand it?”

“Yes, mummy; but——”

“Then we need say no more about it. If you disobey me I shall not let you go out at all.”

Mrs. Pleydell did not care that Eve should see a great deal of Lady Hildegarde, but, without being absolutely rude, it was almost impossible to prevent it. Lady Beechmont was one of those ladies who make very violent, though perhaps not very durable, friendships, and Mrs. Pleydell was at this moment the person whom she had taken up.

The Beechmonts' house in Grosvenor Square was but a very few doors from Mrs. Pleydell's in Upper Grosvenor Street, and the communication between the two was incessant, more especially as Iris was to be one of Lady Imogene's bridesmaids, and the number of things to be settled about the dress and its accessories seemed never-ending. Lady Imogene

herself did not trouble much about the matter.

When Mr. Morton was not in London, she and Iris used to spend a good deal of time in the boudoir, where they were frequently joined by Lord Rootley, always sure of sympathy and interest in anything in which he might be occupied. He learnt to know and appreciate Iris during these quiet talks, better even than he had done in Italy, for Imogene knew all her thoughts, and drew out her opinions better than he had been able to do. Every day he met her she seemed to him to become more delightful, and he allowed the charm of her society to beguile him into putting off the visit to Pinefield which he had intended to pay immediately on his return to England.

It considerably amused Lord Beechmont, who, though languid and indolent, was by no means slow in seeing things, to find his son perpetually finding excuses for not doing what generally was his great pleasure, namely, running down to the country after even the briefest ab-

sence. He knew the reason of Lord Rootley's disinclination to leave London far better than the young man did himself; indeed Lord Rootley had as yet by no means realized the fact that he was in love. A calm bystander like his father saw perfectly well that he was so.

Lord Beechmont was well pleased. He was very anxious that his only son should marry; he was devoted to beauty, and admired Iris almost more than any girl of his acquaintance, and he regarded her as being in every way perfectly satisfactory. And though he was too indolent himself to enter into his son's views, and was much inclined to think that all his trouble was labour in vain, and that he had far better leave well alone, still, as he was so very eager about such matters, it was doubtless better that his wife should sympathise with him. On the whole, he did not think his son could do better, especially as he was by no means easy to please.

While Iris and Lady Imogene talked in the

boudoir, Eve and Lady Hildegarde chattered in the latter's bed-room, their conversation being generally interspersed with remarks on bonnets, and trying on each other's hats.

It was hardly of the practical and edifying nature of the conversation in the boudoir, which both would have voted "deadly dull," and turned chiefly on lovers, compliments, and various escapades of Lady Hildegarde's, to which Eve listened with admiration and longing, and a desperate envy of her friend's greater freedom.

"Ah! it's all very well for you," she said one day, when Lady Hildegarde had been describing how she had spent the whole of the previous evening sitting in the conservatory at a ball, and had never re-appeared till it was time to go home; "you are lucky, and can do just as you like. Now if I don't go back the minute a dance is over there is a fuss, and once when I stayed away for two dances mummy told me if I did so again I should stay at home for a week!"

"I'm obliged to be much more careful now ; Rootley has taken to going everywhere, and he's worse than the crossiest old chaperon. It's a mercy he didn't see me and Bertie last night, or there'd have been no end of a row."

"Oh!" said Eve, somewhat sharply, "so it was Bertie Deverell, was it?"

"Of course ; who else should it be?"

"I didn't know, there are two or three more."

"Not quite like Bertie."

"Do you mean anything, Hildegarde, and—does he? You know he's an awful flirt."

"He means it fast enough. What do you think he had to say to me all last night?"

"I don't know. Tell me."

"You're safe?"

"Of course. Why, you *know* I am ! Didn't I know about Cis Dorrington the year before last ? and did I ever breathe a syllable ?"

"No, no, of course not. Well, Bertie wants me to—elope with him."

"What fun! When is it to be?"

"Never."

"Never! Do you mean to say you don't care for him? Well, I did think——"

"What?"

"Well, that you were really hit this time."

"Perhaps I am."

"Then why——"

"Oh! you silly child, don't you see it's all very well being in love—we both are awfully—but then one knows that it won't last. Of course no one believes those trashy things about love being eternal, and all that sort of thing, that poets write, and that one had to learn in the school-room, and people who know always say that love-matches are the marriages that come to grief first. But it isn't only that. Don't you see, if we eloped, and were married before anyone was the wiser, I should have no settlements."

"What would that matter? Surely they could be made afterwards."

"You goose! they *could*, of course, but there is always a fight to get a man to settle money, and, of course, when he was once married, and had got what he wanted, it would be next door to impossible."

"Well, but you could spend the money just as well whether it was settled or not."

"And have no certainty of pin-money, and, if he died, be left without a jointure! Eve, you are a goose!"

"But why should you elope? Of course, Lord and Lady Beechmont wouldn't like it at first, but you always get your own way in everything, and they'd soon come round."

"Oh! yes; it isn't them we're thinking of. But, you see, Bertie depends entirely on his old uncle, Sir Charles, and, though the title must come to him, all the estates and money are in the old wretch's power."

“But why shouldn’t he like him to marry you?”

“Because he didn’t choose me. He loves power, and likes to dictate what everyone belonging to him is or is not to do. Besides, there is a horrid heiress, with property down in Swedeshire, whose land fits into the Deverell estate, and so he has set his heart on Bertie marrying her.”

“What is she like?”

“Short-sighted, red-haired, has projecting teeth, and can’t speak without giggling.”

“How awful! Poor Bertie! But of course he won’t.”

“He vows not. But one never knows.”

“But he has asked you to elope with him.”

“And was furious last night because I refused point-blank. But I coaxed him into better humour, and I have no doubt by this time he is profoundly grateful to me for not having ruined his prospects.”

“But—I don’t quite understand—how do you stand now?”

“Well, we’re engaged, and—and awfully fond of each other,” and here Lady Hildegarde’s voice broke, and she gave a sob that astonished Eve, but she tried to hide it with a laugh, and went on; “but I daresay it will come to nothing. If old Sir Charles would but die! But people never do when it would do any good! If he did, it would be all right. But he won’t, and some day there’ll be a bad Derby, or Leger, or something, and Bertie ’ll want money, and marry the heiress, and I—shall marry somebody else, and the next year he’ll take me down to dinner somewhere, and we shall talk of the park, and the balls, and *la pluie, et le beau-temps*, and the world will go on just the same.”

“Can’t he get round Sir Charles?”

“He doesn’t see his way to it.”

“Couldn’t you?”

“How am I to get at him? He hardly ever comes to London; besides, his seeing me would

be the worst thing. He thinks a woman ought always to dress in plain black and grey, and never open her mouth. Not much chance for me, eh, Eve?"

"Well, no. I say, Hildegarde," in a very business-like tone, "you'd better get Bertie out of your head as fast as may be."

"As if I didn't know that as well as you could tell me! But it's easier said than done. I can't think why we were ever given hearts; I'm sure they're only a terrible nuisance. I never knew I had one till just lately. Now I do believe, Eve, you're lucky enough not to have one at all, so you can go on amusing yourself, and make a good marriage after all."

Eve laughed, and declared that she fervently hoped that she neither had nor ever should discover that she had so inconvenient an appendage. But, even while she laughed, she was uncomfortably aware that her words were untrue. Her heart, such as it was, was very securely in Claud Urban's keeping, and she

was rapidly becoming very uneasy at his prolonged absence. He had promised her, when leaving Rome, that he would be in London by the 1st of May; it was now the Derby week, and she had neither seen nor heard anything of him.

There was a certain satisfaction that he should not meet Lord Rootley, who might reveal his identity with Mr. Esmond; still that risk must be faced some time or another, and it seemed very strange that he should absent himself so long.

Lady Imogene was to be married on the 1st of June, and Lord Rootley had announced that on the ensuing day he positively must go down to Pinefield and face all the arrears of business that were awaiting him in Firshire. If only Claud would come back then, and speak to her mother at once, all might be safely settled before anyone could make any mischief.

In the meantime, to divert her thoughts, she

flirted even more audaciously than usual, and drove Laurence to the verge of despair.

Laurence had come to London hating the thought of the season, and of the interruption of his ordinary pursuits, but unable to deny himself the pleasure of Eve's society.

It had hitherto been his experience in life to obtain anything that he wished for, and he never doubted for a moment that he should ultimately gain Eve as his wife. It was all very well for Mrs. Pleydell to talk as she had done—of course, at first, she naturally felt sore and aggrieved at losing so good a match for her favourite daughter (Laurence was perfectly well aware of his own value in the matrimonial market)—but in the four months that had elapsed since their interview she would have become reasonable, and have seen that, as it was out of the question to secure him for Iris, she might think herself lucky in getting him for Eve.

As to all that nonsense of not being allowed

to see anything of her till she was one and twenty—nearly two years—that, of course, had only been said in the heat of passion—he always chose to ignore how perfectly cool, composed, and passionless Mrs. Pleydell had been throughout their interview—she would never refer to anything so absurd; and, even if she tried to do so, Eve would not stand it. Dear little, gentle, submissive Eve! She loved him so devotedly that no one could possibly hold out against her misery if forbidden to see him. There could be no difficulty; all must go smoothly; and, confident of everything arranging itself according to his wishes, he established himself in London the first week in May.

He heard where Mrs. Pleydell had taken a house, and called, but she was not at home, neither was Eve, for whom he also asked. Mrs. Pleydell had not contemplated his calling. She thought he would have confined his endeavours to trying to get speech of Eve at parties—but she now gave strict injunctions

that he was, under no circumstances, to be admitted, and renewed her warning to Eve as to her conduct.

That evening they met him at a ball. With an air of perfect unconsciousness of offence—indeed, in his secret heart, he felt rather magnanimous for thus showing he bore no malice for all the hard things she had said to him—he came up to shake hands. From Mrs. Pleydell he received the coldest of bows—she did not seem even to see his offered hand—and an inquiry if his mother were in London. Iris's bow was as cold, but that did not surprise him, still he was rather astonished that she neither blushed nor looked conscious. If he could only have known how wildly her heart throbbed at that moment! It was the first sight of him that called up the old feelings, but, even while feeling almost as if about to faint with emotion, she was able distinctly to realize, with infinite thankfulness, that she no longer loved him.

Laurence drew back somewhat dismayed by

a greeting so different from what he had anticipated. It was not an absolute cut, still two or three acquaintances standing near had witnessed his reception, and he saw, or fancied, a smile on their countenances. He was enraged that he should be slighted, still more that there should be witnesses of his discomfiture. Well, he must find Eve, her welcome would be very different, and, when they were agreed, it would of course be impossible for Mrs. Pleydell to hold out against them.

He at once went in search of Eve, and met her at the head of the stairs coming up from tea on her partner's arm.

"Well, Eve," and he held out his hand.

But she only said, "How do you do?" in a constrained voice.

Then, as he looked at her almost stupefied, a sudden crowd of dancers leaving the room pressed her close up against him, and she whispered, hurriedly,

"I can't help it. I mayn't talk to you;" and gave him a glance of her blue eyes which to him spoke volumes, as she intended that it should.

He made no further attempt to speak to her that night, but stood and watched her, and constantly, as in valsing she swept past the place where he stood, Eve would raise her eyes and give him a glance that set all the blood throbbing in his veins. He went home that morning more passionately in love with Eve than ever.

Sleepless hours were a new experience to Laurence Furnivall, but there was no sleep for him after this first meeting with Eve. She had grown slightly thinner abroad, and he set this down to the fact that she was pining for him. Poor dear little child! how piteous she had looked as she said, "I can't help it. I mayn't talk to you."

Something must be done or she would die of her mother's barbarous cruelty. It was

simply monstrous! Something must be done—but what? That was not so easy to decide. It was evident, though almost incredible, that her mother meant to adhere to her ridiculous determination. But something must be done, or Eve, his sweet little Eve, would die of a broken heart, and he should never know another happy moment.

He would call in Grosvenor Street that morning, and insist on an explanation with Mrs. Pleydell.

“Not at home, sir,” said Simmons.

“Then I will see Miss Pleydell.”

“Not at home, sir.”

“That is not true. I hear her singing;” for Eve, carolling “Buttercup,” was coming down the stairs.

“Not at home, sir.”

Laurence looked at him.

“Have you orders to say that whenever I may call?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Oh, very well,” and he turned away in a rage.

Evidently Mrs. Pleydell was determined, but she should see that he could be so too. He would write to her, and, after many attempts, he succeeded in inditing an epistle wherewith he was satisfied.

He told her that his feelings were precisely the same as when he had last spoken to her, and would always remain so, that it was ridiculous to attempt to divide him from Eve, for their affection for each other was too strong for it to be possible to keep them apart, that it made his heart ache to see how pale and thin the poor child had become with pining since she had been so cruelly separated from him, and that, if she did not at once allow him to approach her, she might have to endure the terrible and lifelong remorse of knowing that she had broken her child's heart.

It was a very vehement epistle, decidedly ungrammatical, and containing some curious

specimens of orthography, but he was very well pleased with it, and considered that it could not fail to have the desired effect.

When Mrs. Pleydell read this violent missive, she was greatly annoyed, but still could hardly refrain from laughing; Laurence wrote so much with the air of a sultan accustomed to be obeyed, and unable to realise that anyone could seriously intend to deny him anything he wished for. She debated for a few moments whether she should answer it, and then, deciding that it would be better not to do so, enclosed it in an envelope, wrote inside "with Mrs. Pleydell's compliments," and returned it to him.

"If even Eve cared about him," she thought, "I could not hear of it at present. But she does not; the only person I have ever seen her appear to care about is that Mr. Urban, and even he seems to have disappeared without seriously disturbing her philosophy. I wonder if we shall see any more of him. I certainly thought he was in love with her and she with

him ; but still he told her he should be in London by the 1st of May, and he has not made his appearance. Well, she does not seem broken-hearted at his absence."

CHAPTER VII.

Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind.

Midsummer Night's Dream.—Act iii, Sc. 2.

On you, most lov'd, with anxious fear I wait,
And from your judgment must expect my fate.

ADDISON.

THE last week in May was the time which Mrs. William Pleydell had fixed for her marriage. Mrs. Pleydell had tried gently to persuade her to wait till October, when the first year of mourning would be over ; but she replied that Mr. Francia was very impatient, and that there were circumstances which she could not explain.

The ceremony was of course very quiet, no one being present excepting Tom Pleydell—who, sorely against his own inclination, gave his stepmother away—Mrs. Pleydell, Iris, and Eve. There was no attempt at a breakfast, and the bride and bridegroom went away direct from the church to spend a short time at Malvern.

“I declare I shouldn’t feel married with a service like that,” Eve observed, as they walked home.

“I think it would be very much more sensible if all weddings were as quiet,” said Tom.

“Well, I don’t. Lady Imogene’s will be a relief after anything so dull.”

“Imogene hates the thought of all the bustle,” said Iris; “it is to please Lady Beechmont and Hildegarde, not herself.”

“Well, I am glad it is to be, whoever it is to please.”

Tom Pleydell was a frequent guest in Upper Grosvenor Street, and his love for Eve lost

none of its intensity, though he realised its hopelessness almost as thoroughly as Mrs. Pleydell herself. Ordinarily clear-sighted, and a very keen judge of character, it was curious how completely love blinded him to all Eve's faults. He still honestly believed her to be loving, affectionate, and tender, and lamented that her mother, though undoubtedly kind to her, still judged her harshly.

Mrs. Pleydell had ceased to argue the point with him; she had candidly told him her convictions, and she knew that he had little or no hope of winning Eve; if, therefore, he deliberately chose the painful pleasure of seeing her making herself agreeable to others, it was not for her to prevent him, whatever she might think of the wisdom of his conduct.

Tom knew that he was foolish; he knew how his heart ached after every hour spent in Eve's company, how wildly he envied the men who were free to woo and win her. Perhaps if he could speak to her now he might have some chance, but marriage was not for him till his

father's debts were all paid, and that, even with his present improved prospects, could not be accomplished for some years. Before he was free, Eve would of course have been long a wife. No, it was of no use hoping in that direction, and poor Tom, with a deep sigh, would plunge into business as the best means of distracting his thoughts.

The day of Lady Imogene's marriage was a lovely one, and everything was as gay and successful as heart could wish. Lord Rootley took Iris in to breakfast.

"I am really going this afternoon," he said to her, when they were comfortably established at one of the small tables.

"This afternoon! That is sudden, is it not?" and Iris was surprised to find what a blow it was, how all the brightness seemed suddenly to have gone out of the day.

She had known he was going, and they had discussed over and over again all that he had to do at Pinefield, and the time that he would be obliged to remain there, which was variously

estimated at from a fortnight to six weeks. But she had thought that there were still two or three days before his departure; the announcement that he was going that afternoon quite disconcerted her.

He was watching her narrowly, and saw her countenance change, but she said quite steadily, after the first exclamation,

“You will find a great deal to do.”

“Yes, how I shall miss you and Imogene to talk it all over with!”

“But I thought Imogene was going to Pinefield after a little.”

“Not for three weeks, and by that time——”

“I thought yesterday you fancied it would take six weeks to do all you wanted.”

“Perhaps it would. But I doubt my staying anything like that time,” and he gave her a look which, to her infinite annoyance, brought a vivid blush to her cheek.

Eager to change the conversation she hastily began to talk of some other topic, and he followed her lead, so that in a few moments

she was at her ease again. But when the happy couple were leaving, and all the bridesmaids were assembled at the door to wish the bride God speed and throw the traditional shoe, he was standing just behind her and whispered,

“I must go now. Good-bye. Will you say that you will be pleased to see me back?”

“I——” she blushed and stammered.

“Say you will not be sorry.”

“No—no;” then, without raising her eyes and still blushing: “I—shall be very glad.”

He gave her hand one fervent pressure and disappeared.

On plea of fatigue, Iris, on their return home, shut herself up in her own room and sat down to think. With the darkening of the sky, when Lord Rootley announced his immediate departure, had come to her the conviction that she loved him. Not a suspicion of it had ever entered her mind before: she had only thought that she liked him excessively, agreed with his views, honoured his principles, considered him

charming as—Imogene's brother : that he could have anything to do with herself had never once occurred to her. But surely that whisper, that earnest pressure of the hand meant something—nay, from one so undemonstrative meant much. “Will you say that you will be glad to see me when I come back?” Ah! he did not know how glad.

Was she very fickle? Iris wondered, as she moved slowly backwards and forwards in her room; somehow it seemed quite impossible to her to sit still. It was but five months since she had loved Laurence; did it show great unsteadiness of purpose that she had so soon learnt to love another?

Fickleness was a characteristic which had always been abhorrent to her; she had hoped that her nature was steadfast in all things. Had she been all the time deceiving herself? Was she a weathercock like the women she had so bitterly despised when she read of them in novels? It would indeed be bitter to her to think that she was no better than they!

But was it fickle to withdraw her love from one who scorned it, and to bestow it on another who seemed in every respect more worthy? Now that the glamour of love was no longer before her eyes, Iris saw Laurence as he really was rather than as her fancy painted him, and her strong good sense enabled her to see that she had loved rather the creature of her own imagination than the man himself.

She felt that Lord Rootley was a character of a totally different type; then, too, her sad experience had caused her to become more clear-sighted, to distinguish better what was real and what her own fancy. She was very glad she had seen Laurence. If she had not, she could not have felt so certain that all feeling for him was dead. If only she could feel assured that it was not fickle, did not show her to be frivolous and weak to be able to love again so soon! For, if she were vain and frivolous, she would not be worthy of him.

Then she told herself that it was weak of

her to distress herself thus. Had she not always felt a certain contempt for the heroines who, deserted by their lovers, had refused to be comforted, and remained faithful to the memory of those who had tired of and left them? Had she not always maintained that a woman who could mourn for a man who no longer cared for her had no proper feminine pride?

And why should she now doubt the propriety of acting fearlessly on her own heartfelt convictions? Her mother, she knew perfectly, agreed with her, and what she thought was sure to be right. And so Iris, comforted as to her own conduct, walked happily downstairs to tea.

“Ah, here is Iris, after all,” said her mother. “I would not send for you, dear, as you said you were tired, but I am glad you are come. Here is Lady Netherleigh.”

After an affectionate embrace, Iris perceived Mr. Thornham standing behind Lady Netherleigh, and gave him a most cordial greeting,

little suspecting the false hopes she was raising in his mind.

“Ah!” said Lady Netherleigh, “I have heard a great deal of your Roman experiences: Mr. Thornham has been with us for the last fortnight down at Netherleigh, so we have had time to talk comfortably. It must all have been very delightful.”

“Indeed it was,” said Iris, earnestly; “and Mr. Thornham was the most wonderful cicerone, and showed us everything: It would not have been half so pleasant without him.”

Mr. Thornham coloured a little with pleasure, and his heart throbbed with hope. Lady Netherleigh, who was in his confidence, was by no means so sanguine.

“She would never have said that if she had cared for him,” she thought; “she spoke as composedly as if she were talking of the courier. No, poor Frank has not made the impression he hopes for yet. What he may do if there is no one before him in the field, of course I cannot say. Well, I will not inter-

fere; he is old enough to manage matters for himself; but I'm sure I wish him success. He is charming, and she might do very much worse."

There were several other people present, and the conversation was very general; but Mrs. Pleydell noticed that Mr. Thornham never left Iris's side, and that, when she was talking to others, he sat silent and watched her. It was evident that the devotion she had observed in Rome was no passing feeling, but that he was still in the same mind; but what Iris's views in the matter might be she did not know.

Mrs. Pleydell had been better pleased with Eve's conduct than she had at all anticipated that she should be—at least, with respect to Laurence. She carefully confined herself to bowing to him, and her mother naturally knew nothing of the meaning glances which she threw at him over her partners' shoulders, or of the hand thrust into his when passing in a

crowd, and pressed with a fervour which gave exquisite pain.

Not knowing of these small encouragements accorded to his passion, it naturally amazed Mrs. Pleydell to see that he haunted Eve like her very shadow. He was at every party, and certainly at every ball, to which they went; he spoke to few people, and danced with none, but stood patiently all night with his eyes fixed on Eve.

Not, as we say, knowing of his slight encouragements, she marvelled greatly what satisfaction he could possibly derive from the contemplation of the girl he professed to love, flirting as Eve seemed unable to help doing. It was quite useless to speak to her on the subject. She would open her blue eyes, look as innocent as a child, and ask what she *was* to do. People *would* be pleasant to her, and she really could not snub everybody even if she knew how.

Her mother would sigh and marvel what would be the fate of this most tormenting

child. She wondered very greatly what had become of Mr. Esmond. She listened eagerly to the names of the partners that Eve introduced to her, but his never appeared. She could only imagine that the supposition in the country was true, that he was really married, and that he had only been amusing himself with Eve during the dulness of a summer on the Banner.

But then there was the letter that led to her journey to London, and the two others she had opened during the child's illness. Well! she could only conjecture that on finding that the girl's family was cognisant of the matter, and that she would in future be better watched and guarded, he had given the matter up. Eve had taken it very coolly—especially after the strange way in which she had at first sobbed and raved, but that she could have had no communication with him her mother felt quite sure, she had taken such infinite precautions respecting the letters.

Poor Mrs. Pleydell, turning all this over in

her mind before going to dress for a ball on the night of Lady Imogene's wedding, would have been considerably startled had she been told that the very man of whom she was thinking was within a few feet of her—absolutely dining in the next house.

When Eve entered Mrs. Bartlemere's ball-room that evening, she gave a sudden start, for the first person she saw was—Claud Urban. He joined them at once, saying in a pointed manner to Mrs. Pleydell that he had hoped to see them again much sooner, but that the disturbed condition of Ireland made it necessary for him to remain there much longer than he had at first intended.

Eve was at once carried off by a partner who had engaged her before she saw Claud, and who found her unusually dull, for not knowing, as Iris did, of Lord Rootley's departure, she was in momentary fear of his making his appearance and spoiling everything.

Mr. Urban remained with Mrs. Pleydell, and by the attention he paid her she felt tolerably

sure that her impressions as to his feelings towards Eve were correct, more especially as he took occasion to mention some of his relatives with whom she happened to be acquainted.

Laurence was as usual leaning against the wall with his eyes fixed upon Eve. He had at once recognised Mr. Urban as the man who had paid her so much attention in the winter at Beechmont, and whom he believed he had seen kiss her on the night of the skating fête; he was therefore keenly on the watch for any sign of good understanding between them.

During her first dance with Claud, Eve was far too full of the satisfaction of the moment to think of Laurence or of the eloquent glances wherewith she was wont to gratify him, and it was not till they stopped nearly opposite to him, and she observed his moody, suspicious countenance, that she even remembered his existence.

“I thought you had forgotten all about me

and were never coming back," she said, with a pretty pout.

"No, Eve, you thought nothing of the sort, you knew I should come the minute I could. And now I shall speak to your mother at once."

"If only she once says yes before she knows who you—were."

"Who is there to tell her?"

"I don't know anyone but Lord Rootley. He and Iris are such friends he'd be sure to tell her, and she'd 'think it her duty' to make mischief."

"Well, he doesn't seem to be here to-night, and I shall ask Mrs. Pleydell if I may call and see her to-morrow morning, so after all we shall get a start."

"And I believe he goes into the country to-morrow. Oh! Claud, mummy'd be *awful* if she knew!"

"Don't distress yourself, little Birdie, she never need know anything about it. I say, does the bucolic swain always stand glaring at

you like that? He looks as if he were trying to mesmerise you."

"I mayn't speak to him, you know, and he goes everywhere we do, and never dances or does anything but stand and look at me."

"Very pleasant it must be for him to see you dancing and laughing with everyone else! I think, Eve, even your vengeance must be satisfied."

"No, not yet," said Eve, with a laugh. "I *know* some day before long he won't be able to *help* speaking, and then I shall have the pleasure of telling him the truth," and, as they again entered the circle of dancers, she gave Laurence one of her most speaking glances.

But, in spite of all such consolation as she bestowed upon him, Laurence was more unhappy that night than he had yet been. He watched every variation of Eve's face and manner, and, being a person interested, came to the conclusion that there was something very different between her and Claud from what there was

between her and any other of her partners. Yet so complete was his infatuation, his belief in her love for himself, that he never thought of blaming her, but settled that her mother insisted on her being civil to this man, who was so evidently in love with her, and she had to pretend to like him for the sake of peace at home.

Poor little Eve! what a mournful glance her blue eyes had given him more than once that night, as if begging him not to judge her harshly. As if he were likely to do so!

But he could bear the present state of things no longer. At a water-party to which he knew she was going he would contrive an opportunity of speaking to her, of telling her he could live no longer without her, of suggesting an elopement. Among the trees at Clieveden there was sure to be some opportunity of getting speech of her.

Another person was looking forward to that same water-party as the crisis of his fate. Mr. Thornham had determined that he must put

his fortune to the touch, and the fact—which he had heard casually that evening—that Lord Rootley had left town an hour after his sister's wedding, gave him some hope. If he had been his rival, as he had so greatly feared at Florence, would he have left London, unless, indeed, he had been refused? It seemed improbable. And, if he were not the favoured one, why should there not be a chance for him? He and Iris had been great friends both at Netherleigh and abroad, she had greeted him warmly on his arrival in London—he would not fear his fate.

“May I come and see you early to-morrow?” said Claud Urban to Mrs. Pleydell, as he took her down to supper. “I have something to say to you, and would rather run no risk of interruption.”

“Any time after eleven will suit me,” replied Mrs. Pleydell, smiling, and thinking it was easy to guess the subject of his interview.

After she reached home she began to meditate on a point that had already given her some

anxiety. Should she or should she not say anything to Mr. Urban respecting Eve and Mr. Esmond? According to her views of the perfect openness that ought to exist between husband and wife it was absolutely necessary that he should know it; besides, it would show him what a careless child he proposed to marry, and would incline him to be more careful of her—and Mrs. Pleydell felt that Eve would indeed require the most jealous care—but of course the information should not come from her, but from Eve herself.

But could Eve be trusted to tell him? Her mother feared not. The girl was always most careful not to reveal anything that in the smallest degree told against herself, and she felt sure that, even if she could be persuaded to tell him anything at all, she would so alter and embroider the story that he would have but a very faint idea of what had occurred.

If it had been Iris she could have trusted her to tell any man she was about to marry what-

ever she considered it right that he should know; but Eve was different. Yes, disagreeable as was the task, she thought she must tell him herself, and with this unpleasant conclusion she at length fell asleep.

It was very little past eleven when Mr. Urban was announced.

"I fancy you pretty well know the object of my visit," he said, as soon as they were seated; "it is to ask you to give me Eve."

"Yes, I thought so. I suppose you have her consent, though she has said nothing to me."

"I wonder at that. Mrs. Pleydell, I love her very dearly, and I think and hope I can make her very happy."

"She is terribly young."

"Past nineteen—besides, that is a fault that grows less every day."

"I think," said Mrs. Pleydell, with an effort that brought a bright colour into her usually pale cheeks, "that, young as Eve is, there is something in her history that you ought to

know before we go any further. She is so young that possibly the necessity, or, at any rate, the propriety of telling you herself might not occur to her, and if you were to discover it later you might very reasonably be displeased at its having been kept secret."

"If," said Mr. Urban, speaking gravely, but almost irresistibly struck by the absurdity of the situation, "if the matter you refer to is Eve's acquaintance with Mr. Esmond, I know everything about it to the minutest detail. I also know that it was on her account that the marriage of Miss Netherleigh with Mr. Furnivall was broken off."

"Then she has told you everything!" cried Mrs. Pleydell, in extreme surprise. "I have done the child injustice; I feared she would not tell you, and I felt it was right, nay, necessary you should know. Eve is very young, Mr. Urban, and will require very careful guidance. I really believe she flirts almost without knowing or intending it. You must not leave her to herself; you must promise me to watch over her."

“You may depend on my doing that.”

Claud did not believe in Eve's involuntary flirtations; he thought very few girls knew so accurately what they were about, but he was quite in earnest when he told Mrs. Pleydell he should watch over her. He had not the least intention of having a flirting wife, but he never for a moment doubted that he could control Eve whenever and however he chose.

“I am glad of it. I cannot tell you what a relief it is to my mind to think that she told you everything.”

Mr. Urban said no more on the subject, but proceeded to talk of business. His views were very generous, and Mrs. Pleydell was amply satisfied. At the close of the interview she left the room to call Eve.

“I am greatly pleased with him, dear,” she said, kissing her; “and, Eve, I am more glad than I can say to find that you had told him all about Mr. Esmond. I feared you might not, and thought it right to do so, but he

stopped me at once, saying you had told him everything."

Poor Mrs. Pleydell would have been both astonished and dismayed had she known the immoderate mirth to which her mystification gave rise.

CHAPTER VIII.

If you oblige me suddenly to choose
My choice is made—and I must you refuse.

DRYDEN.

MR. and Mrs. Francia returned that day from their honeymoon, and Mrs. Francia, coming directly after luncheon to see her sister-in-law, was informed of Eve's prospects.

“Well, it is pretty good, I suppose,” she said, after hearing what Mrs. Pleydell had to tell. “I think, if all had gone well, and she had stayed with me, I could have done better for her; but it is no use to think of that now. But you talk of Irish estates; I hope he has

something besides that. It is not much to trust to in these days."

"Oh! he has plenty besides."

"And when is it to be?"

"My dear Louisa, I don't in the least know; it was only settled this morning. She is so very young and childish, I wish he would wait a year!"

"But you may be sure he won't. Nonsense, Grace! announce it at once, and have it in July; the child will have so many more presents if she is married in the season."

"I can't look upon that as a reason," said Mrs. Pleydell, laughing; "I shall want a little time to accustom myself to the idea. Well, when it is once announced there is one comfort, we shall no longer be haunted by Mr. Furnivall, who has been Eve's shadow ever since we came home. That will be rather a relief to me."

"Can I see Eve?"

"Not now; she is lying down. When Mr. Urban went away, she said she was very

tired, and went to lie down. I saw her asleep just now."

"Will you come down with me to Belgrave Square, and see how the decorators have progressed in our absence? There are one or two things I want to consult you about."

Mrs. Pleydell agreed, and spent the greater part of the afternoon endeavouring by her suggestions to tone down Mrs. Francia's somewhat pronounced taste. When she returned home, Eve was in the drawing-room.

"Mummy, look at my ring. Is it not a love?"

It was indeed a beauty: a superb ruby set in diamonds.

"And you are happy, Eve?"

"Oh, yes, very. And—mummy—Claud wants—it—to be very soon."

"What does he call soon?"

"Oh, he talked nonsense about next week, but of course I laughed at that. How could my trousseau be ready?"

"It was nonsense, of course. This time next year would be more like it."

"Next year!" cried Eve, in alarm. "Oh, no, mummy! I promised him the second week in July, if Madame Verdure could be ready."

"There is a good deal to be said and done before it is settled, Eve."

"Yes, of course, I know; but, mummy, you'll come to Madame Verdure the *very first* thing to-morrow, won't you? There's no time to lose, she's so awfully busy; and, you know, there is Lady Vortigern's party to-morrow, and we start for Maidenhead at twelve o'clock. Oh, and, mummy," and she paused and blushed.

"Well, Eve, what?"

"If—if to-morrow poor Laurence is there, mayn't I speak to him? I should like to tell him myself."

Mrs. Pleydell paused for a moment.

"Very well—yes, if you very much wish it—that is to say, Eve, if Mr. Urban has

no objection. Remember you are to ask him."

"Oh, Claud will be all right," said Eve, complacently.

Iris was feeling more than ever how completely Lord Rootley had won her heart. The blank left by his absence was greater than she could have imagined possible. She was constantly following in her thoughts his proceedings at Pinefield, which she could pretty well guess from the many talks she had had on the subject with him and Lady Imogene.

All the affairs of the night-schools, the labourers' clubs in the different villages, the lending libraries, and coffee-houses had been discussed with her so often that she almost seemed to understand the idiosyncrasies of each village, and the peculiar difficulties to be encountered from the opposition, or want of comprehension of the clergyman in one parish, the doctor in another, and the school-master in a third.

He had said how terribly he should miss

Imogene, that a woman's help was often so essential, and she wished with all her heart she could be with him, and supply his sister's place. It would be far preferable to this London life, of which she was heartily weary. (Up to the moment of hearing of Lord Rootley's immediate departure, Iris had thought London absolutely delightful.) Where was the use of going out?

There was no one she wanted to see; she would far rather stay at home and read. She wished they were not going to this water-party, though only two days before she had been full of delight at the thought of seeing some of the beauties of the Thames, but then she had expected that he would be there to enjoy them with her. Altogether, Iris was far from happy when they set out, and but little inclined for a day's pleasure.

Eve had carried her point, and dragged her mother off to Madame Verdure in search of the trousseau; and, though Mrs. Pleydell still persisted that she had by no means

bound herself to consent to the date which the young people had fixed, Eve announced it to Madame Verdure, and insisted that everything must be ready by that time. She chattered about dress the whole way to Paddington, till Iris felt that any change of company and topic would be a relief.

Sir Charles and Lady Netherleigh, and Mr. Thornham were of the party, and went down in the same carriage. Mr. Thornham contrived to sit next to Iris. She was always glad to talk to him, and, when they left the train, she fell almost as naturally to his charge as Eve did to Claud's, Sir Charles taking Mrs. Pleydell, and a young man who had made the eighth in the carriage Lady Netherleigh. They were towed, in a great river barge, up to Clieveden, and, while the luncheon was being spread, no one was inclined to stray far.

"Claud," said Eve, "after lunch I mean to have it out with Laurence. I shall be easier in my mind when it is over and done with."

“Better leave the poor fellow alone ; you’ve made him quite miserable enough already.”

“No, no, I’ve set my heart upon it.”

“I thought Mrs. Pleydell had forbidden you to speak to him?”

“Yes; but I told mummy I must just this once, to tell him about—us.”

“Well, wilful woman must have her way, I suppose! What is it you want me to do?”

“Why, to go away a little after luncheon, and I will go a little way apart and give him a tiny nod of encouragement. It will not take long.”

“And what does your mother say to July?”

“Oh! it will be all right. We went to Verdure this morning. Fancy, Claud! at first she talked of this time next year!”

“That was only to tease you, my pet.”

“Mummy wouldn’t put it in the *Morning Post*. So I wrote it myself; it will be in to-

morrow. That is why I must speak to Laurence to-day."

"I cannot think why you are so set upon it," he said, almost testily. "Well, all I can say is I hope it will relieve us from his constant *espionage*. Look how he is glaring at me now."

"I fancy he is very jealous," said Eve, coolly. "Now people are beginning to move; you stroll away presently, and leave the rest to me."

Very gradually and naturally Eve withdrew herself from the surrounding groups after Claud had left her, according to her bidding, and, turning at the edge of the wood, made a slight sign to Laurence, who, as usual, was watching her closely. He sprang forward, and she led the way into the wood.

"Eve! darling! at last!"

"Yes, I said I could bear it no longer; I must speak to you."

"My own darling! these weeks have been very hard to bear, have they not?"

“And I do not see any such great harm. Surely it was better that you should not marry Iris when you found out you did not care for her?”

“And when I had found the only woman I could ever love. Eve, my darling, you are mine, whatever happens, of course; but what are we to do about your mother?”

“When I told her I *must* speak to you to-day, she said I might if——”

“Then she is relenting! Eve, let us go to her together and say that we will never be separated again. But what condition did she make? You say she said ‘if’?”

“Oh, yes—that I might, if Claud had no objection.”

She was sitting on the trunk of a fallen tree, he was half lying, half kneeling on the grass bank beside her. At her words he raised himself till his eyes were on a level with hers.

“What do you mean? Who is Claud? What has he to do with us?”

“Don’t you know?” said Eve, opening her eyes and looking very innocent. “It is Mr. Urban; he was at Beechmont, you know, in the winter.”

“What has he to do with your speaking to me?”

“Mummy thought he mightn’t like it, because I am engaged to him.”

“You engaged! Great heaven, what does this mean? Eve, you are engaged to me; no one shall take you from me!”

“Engaged—to you!” said Eve, opening her eyes to their widest extent, as if no such possibility had ever occurred to her. “Oh, dear, no, Laurence! I never even thought of such a thing.”

He seized her hands and held them in a grip of iron.

“Eve, that is not true; you knew I loved you. Why else was my marriage with Iris broken off?”

“Yes, of course I knew that,” was the composed answer.

“And do you mean to say that you did not lead me on? did not compel me to love you? I loved Iris till the time that you, Eve, began to tempt me, to let me see you cared for me, to make yourself indispensable to me. That night you let me kiss you—you kissed me in return—you do not mean to tell me that you do not care for me, that you love another? You cannot have changed so soon. Besides, those speaking, loving looks you have given me every night, that I have lived on for weeks past, what did they mean if you do not care for me?”

“They mean neither more nor less than anything else,” said Eve, coolly. “You gossiped to Iris about me, just as any spiteful old woman might have done—I mean about having seen me by the river; and then she, after promising to say nothing, went and told mummy, and made no end of mischief. I was scolded just like a naughty child, and watched, and not allowed to move by myself: that was why you met me with Rogers. Of course, you

were rather more amusing than she was, so I was glad of the exchange of gaolers for that reason, but still more because it gave me the opportunity of being revenged upon you both—you and Iris, I mean. I knew there was no difficulty about making you fall in love with me—I had only to flatter your vanity enough, which Iris never did; if she had, she would never have lost you, but she was too proud or too stupid, or something. You fell into the trap very easily; there was no trouble or even excitement about it, and you really believed I was in love with you, though you knew how I used to laugh at you when I first came home. How you did dislike me then, to be sure!”

“Do you mean me to believe”—his voice was hoarse and husky—“that you never *meant* to marry me? Why, you talked of Rookwood, and of the delights of living there, till—till——”

“Till you absolutely believed me, and I nearly died of laughing at the thought.

What! *I* marry a man who hasn't an idea in his head except horses and dogs, and who asks nothing better than to live in his stupid country place from January to Christmas! No, thank you. The only thing I regret is that I have only punished *you* for meddling with my affairs, not Iris. I thought her pride would be so hurt by all the gossip in the county, and mummy got her away before anyone knew. I have saved her from perpetual imprisonment at Rookwood, and she had the delight of three months in Rome. Very dull, *I* thought it, but she was in the seventh heaven."

"Whatever your faults may be, Eve," said Laurence, with a haggard smile, "no one, in this interview, at least, can accuse you of want of frankness. You have poured out all your bitterness upon me, and now we had better part. It is a just retribution to me for my conduct to Iris; I have been so besotted by my passion for you that till this moment I had hardly realised the enormity of my conduct to

her. I have been a blind fool—I have lost the substance for the shadow. But for one thing, Eve, I thank you, and that is for your plain-speaking. You have shown me your character in its true colours, and from the bottom of my soul I pity your future husband. If there were not another woman upon earth, I would not marry you now.”

“It is so easy to say that the grapes are sour,” said Eve, sharply.

She had expected reproaches, bursts of anguish, passionate entreaties, all tributes to her power, and instead she was receiving a lecture—it was most mortifying. The sweets of this revenge, too, seemed about to fail her.

He smiled sadly.

“No, Eve, the grapes are not sour, though it may please you to think so. I believe I ought to thank you cordially for the lesson you have given me; it will be strange if I am led astray by my vanity a second time. You are quite right—it must have been egregious. I

can see it now. But who could ever have suspected a girl like you, little more than a child, of such finished scheming, such bitter malice?"

"Well, I have not done you much harm, it seems," said Eve, sulkily.

"No—as I say, I ought rather to feel indebted to you. But there is nothing more for us to say to each other. Shall I take you back to Mrs. Pleydell?"

Eve rose sulkily from her seat. This was a worse disappointment to her even than the failure of her revenge upon Iris. She had made so sure of it, had gloated in anticipation over her triumph, and it was bitter to lose it.

She walked in silence by Laurence's side till she reached the lawn where Mrs. Pleydell and Lady Netherleigh were seated together, and, with a bow to her and her mother, he left her without a word.

"You don't look as if the interview had been productive of all the satisfaction you antici-

pated, Birdie," said Claud, when he re-joined her.

"He is odious!" said Eve, vehemently—"simply odious! I never want to see or hear of him again!"

Mr. Urban smiled to himself. He was quite aware of Eve's overweening self-love, and he guessed that in some way or other the disappointed swain had wounded it somewhat severely, but in what manner he was too discreet to inquire. He was of a very indolent temperament, and dearly loved that everything should go smoothly. He was not a man of high principle himself, and did not either demand or expect it in his wife; all he asked was that she should be pretty, piquante, and in love with him, and these three qualifications he believed himself to have secured in Eve.

He had been in love many a time before, many girls had believed themselves sure of his preference, but—the magic words had never been spoken, and they had seen him slowly but

surely drift away from them to some one else. It was hard to say why Eve had been more successful than others, perhaps he hardly knew himself. It might be the unconventionality of their first meeting and subsequent interviews, or else the piquancy of the situation of causing Mrs. Pleydell to receive unconsciously as an accepted son-in-law the man with whom she had so peremptorily refused to hold any communication.

At any rate he was well satisfied. He supposed he must marry some day, and Eve had somehow, rather to his surprise, not only made him fall in love with her, but absolutely had not wearied him in the least during the time they were together in Rome. Generally he tired of people so easily; there really must be something in the girl, and he was a very lucky man. Altogether a different sort of devotion from that with which honest Tom Pleydell still worshipped Eve, and which, being ungilded, was so absolutely uninteresting to her.

While Eve and Laurence had been engaged in one portion of the wood, Iris and Mr. Thornham had been together in another. He had suggested that, as she had never been at Cliveden before, she was in duty bound to climb up to the terrace and enjoy the view, and they had started in that direction in company with Sir Charles.

Iris had no idea that he did not intend to accompany them the whole way, but Sir Charles was somewhat slow in his movements, and averse to hills, besides having a very clear perception that his society was not required by one of the party, and that this was emphatically one of the occasions when two were better company than three.

So before they were half-way up he pleaded fatigue, seated himself on a bench, and told them to go on, he would follow presently. Iris suggested waiting for him, but this he would not hear of; indeed they were no sooner out of sight than he quietly retraced his steps to the lawn below.

Iris suspected nothing of his manoeuvres, though her companion did, and was duly grateful to him; however she was not in the least shy, having not the faintest suspicion of Mr. Thornham's feeling for her.

They admired the view for some time, and thence strayed naturally to reminiscences of some of the expeditions they had made together in Rome, discussing the views from Albano and Rocca di Papa, the expanse of the Campagna, the difference between Italian and English colouring, and many other similar topics.

"Ah! those were pleasant days," said Mr. Thornham, with so deep a sigh that Iris replied, with a smile,

"But why should you sigh so profoundly at a pleasant memory? There will be plenty more days equally agreeable. Take to-day for instance."

"Yes, it is very charming," said Mr. Thornham; "but I think that the charm of those Roman days was that I then ventured to be more hopeful."

“Hopeful?” and Iris looked at him inquiringly.

The completely unembarrassed manner in which she asked the question should have been warning sufficient to him that she was quite unconscious of his meaning, and that there was therefore little or no ground for him to hope. But his agitation was too great for him to perceive this, and he said, abruptly,

“Yes, Miss Netherleigh; then, when I saw so much of you, I ventured to hope that I—that you—that is—that there might be a chance for me.”

There could be no doubt of the fact that Iris was thoroughly taken by surprise; she half started from her seat, and turned from white to red as she said,

“Oh! Mr. Thornham, I am so sorry, so distressed! indeed, indeed I never thought of this!”

“Don’t tell me I may not hope,” he said, laying his hand for a moment on hers.

“Oh, but I must—it is impossible!” she said.

“Oh! forgive me if I have misled you, but indeed I never thought of such a thing.”

“But will you not think of it now? Oh! Miss Netherleigh—Iris”—taking her hand,—“I have loved you ever since we first met at Netherleigh, and since I knew you were free—above all, since that happy time in Rome—I—”

“Do not let us talk of it,” said Iris, gently, disengaging her hands; “indeed it is of no use. I can give you no hope. I am only so very, very sorry that this has happened, and, if it has been occasioned by anything I have done, I can only ask you to forgive me, and assure you that indeed I never thought of your caring for me.”

“Do not imagine I blame you, that is the thing farthest from my thoughts. It is only—so—so terrible a blow. Oh! forgive me—don’t think me impertinent, but—if—if there is no one else—I—I would wait for years, if you could give me the least hope.”

The tears flowed down Iris’s cheeks. She put her hand on his.

“Please say no more,” she said, earnestly ; “you are very good not to blame me, but I can’t help feeling as if I must have done very wrong—must have done something to mislead you. Oh, if you could know how *very*, *VERY*, *VERY* sorry I am !”

“But—but, Iris, is it so utterly hopeless ?”

“Yes,” she almost whispered : “yes, it is indeed.”

“Then I will vex you no more. And you are not to trouble yourself. Oh, my darling, my darling !” and he saw how bitterly she was weeping : “forgive me for calling you so this once, but I am more sorry than I can say to have made you unhappy. If you can, forget what I have said.”

“But I cannot,” said poor Iris, who, quite unreasonably, felt as guilty as if she had acted the part of the veriest coquette. “How can I forget that you, whom I like so much, are unhappy—and—about me ?”

“You must remember that I owe my unhappiness to my own presumptuous folly, and to no

fault of yours. I am more sorry than I can say that I spoke at all—you must forgive me that—I could not help it. And—forgive me if I leave you now—I cannot face all those people again.”

He pressed her hand fervently to his lips, wrung it with a force that was excruciating pain, and was gone, leaving Iris to find her way back to the rest of the party alone.

It was some short time before she was sufficiently composed to set forth on her return journey; when she did, it was a very great comfort to encounter Sir Charles just at the bottom of the path before she emerged on to the lawn. He had not quite shared his wife's certainty as to Mr. Thornham's success, and had, therefore, rather kept in the way in case Iris, as proved to be the case, might be thankful for his escort. He made no remark upon her appearing alone, began to talk on indifferent subjects, and only revenged himself by saying to his wife that night,

“Well, Milly, confess that I knew which

way the wind blew better than you did.”

Laurence and Mr. Thornham went up to town in the same train considerably before the rest of the party, but they carefully avoided entering the same carriage.

CHAPTER IX.

Money and man a mutual falsehood show,
Men make false money, money makes men so.

Henry VII. C. ALEYN.

MRS. PLEYDELL was struck with the expression of Iris's countenance when she re-joined her, and remarked that she was particularly silent and *distracte* during the rest of the afternoon; but, strangely enough, she did not connect it with Mr. Thornham's disappearance, though both Sir Charles and Lady Netherleigh did so at once.

Mrs. Pleydell had imagined in Rome that Mr. Thornham cared for Iris, but her belief had

been rather shaken by his choosing to leave their party at Florence and return home by a different route. And in the bustle in which they had lived since their arrival in London she had hardly given him a thought, having decided in her own mind that she must have been mistaken, or he would certainly not have disappeared for such a length of time.

Neither had her suspicions been awakened with regard to Lord Rootley. He and Iris had certainly had a great deal to say to each other, but they had talked quite openly, without any appearance of a *tête-à-tête*, and her mother hardly realised how much they had seen of each other in London when Iris was visiting Lady Imogene. She saw that her beautiful eldest daughter received her full share of admiration, but she did not perceive that she distinguished one of her admirers above the others, and was not greatly surprised, attributing it to her inability to care for anyone so soon after Laurence's defection.

Iris was very thankful that her mother made no remark either on her long absence or upon her disturbed appearance. She felt sure that her countenance must bear the traces of tears, and knew that any inquiry as to what was the matter would be more than she could bear, more especially as she could not of course reveal the real cause of her agitation; the secret was not hers to tell. She was very glad when there was a move homewards, and felt it quite a relief that they had no engagements for that evening.

Mr. Urban dined with them quietly, and made himself as pleasant as he well knew how to do. What did he see in Eve? Mrs. Pleydell asked herself with surprise; he seemed so superior to her frivolous little daughter. Well, she supposed it was the great contrast that formed the charm, and certainly she showed to considerable advantage in his presence, and appeared—Mrs. Pleydell half unconsciously never committed herself even in thought to saying more than that Eve *seemed* to think or

do anything—to be extremely attached to him.

After all, as he seemed to be quite awake to the fact that she would require careful watching, and not in the least inclined to shirk his responsibility in the matter, she began to feel that it would be a great relief to her to know that Eve was safely married; and, as all appeared to be satisfactory, there really seemed no tangible reason for postponing the marriage, and therefore, when attacked by both Claud and Eve after dinner, she yielded after a very faint show of resistance, and agreed that the wedding should be fixed for the second week in July.

She was somewhat surprised, on taking up the *Morning Post* the next morning, to find the announcement of the marriage, and of its probable date, but she attributed it to Claud rather than to Eve, and really, now that it was settled, she had no objection to its being generally known.

Eve ran in presently to ask if she might go

to Aunt Louisa; she wanted to "tell her all about it, and be congratulated," and, having received permission, set forth attended by her maid.

Iris, as usual in the morning, was reading in her own room, and Mrs. Pleydell settled down to a long morning of necessary letter-writing. She had been thus engaged for more than an hour, when the door opened, and looking up she saw Tom Pleydell, looking so pale and dismayed that she at once started up in alarm.

"Tom, what is it? For heaven's sake, tell me at once! Is it Eve?"

He gave a sort of ghastly smile.

"It is nothing about Eve, Aunt Grace, and it is no accident to anybody, only I have just discovered something very extraordinary, and you are the only person I can talk to about it."

"It is something that has upset you very much, at any rate," said his aunt. "Sit down, Tom, and tell me all about it."

He sat down, and made two or three efforts to speak, but without result. At last he said,

“You know Mr. Francia has gone away for a day or two?”

“Yes. Louisa told me there was some business at Liverpool. I wondered at his going so immediately after their return home, and she said it was quite imperative, as it was most important business that no one but himself could transact, or else, of course, he would have sent you. Oh, Tom! I do hope there is nothing wrong about the business just as you have so advantageous a start.”

“It is not exactly about the business. It is worse. Aunt Grace, Francia is not Francia at all.”

“My dear Tom, what do you mean? If he is not Francia, who on earth is he? And if he is living under an assumed name, surely the business must be—cannot be all right.”

“You remember the telegram about my father’s death from San Francisco?”

"Of course, but what has that to do with Mr. Francia, or whoever he may be?"

"Aunt Grace, that telegram was sent by Francia—and—it was untrue."

"Untrue! Do you mean your father is alive? How was the mistake made?"

"It was no mistake—it was—a fraud."

"But, good heavens! Louisa! She has married this man! And, if William is alive, it is—bigamy—though, of course, quite unintentional on her part! Tom, how very, very shocking! What could have been the motive? And what can be done?"

Tom rose from his chair, and took two or three turns up and down the room, then he said,

"Aunt Grace, has not Francia ever reminded you of anyone? I don't mean of anyone in particular, but have you not felt a certainty that you had either known him before, or else been very intimate with some one of whom he reminds you strongly?"

“I have not seen much of him, you know, but, now you mention it, I remember that the first time I met him in Park Street something in his eyes—which are very peculiar with his colouring—gave me something of the feeling you describe.”

“I cannot think,” said Tom, speaking half to himself. “I cannot conceive now how I could have been deceived for a moment.”

“Why, you do not mean that Mr. Francia is anyone we know?”

“Aunt Grace, cannot you guess? Not after what I have told you?” And then, seeing that she still looked hopelessly bewildered, he continued, “It is my father himself.”

“Your father!”

Mrs. Pleydell stared at him as if believing that he had taken leave of his senses. Indeed, at first, such was her firm belief, but gradually she saw that he was completely in earnest, and continued:

“But how—why—what possible motive? How did you discover it?”

“He left me directions to open all letters that came to the City. He said all private letters were always sent to his private address, and so I was to open all that were directed to him. This morning I was doing so as usual, had gone through about a dozen, and made marginal notes of the necessary answers, when I came to one which startled me by beginning, ‘Mr. Pleydell.’ I looked again at the address—it was to F. Francia, all right, so I concluded the correspondent had directed it to the senior partner by mistake, while really writing to me, the junior. So I began it, and, by the time I had read the first page, I knew that it was not meant for me, but that I had a right to read it—that it was addressed to my father, who had circulated a false report of his death, and returned to trade under an assumed name and personality in London with the money he fraudulently carried off from his creditors. The object of his visit to Liverpool is to negotiate with a man who is cognisant of the fraud, to buy his

silence in short. The man who wrote the letter is in San Francisco, and, as far as I can make out, he was for some reason supposed to be dead, and my father believes that there is only the one witness he is now interviewing at Liverpool. I have all along thought it very strange how completely Francia's mode of thought and views of business coincided with my father's; now I know the truth, I cannot conceive how I have been blinded so long."

"It is the most wonderful history," said Mrs. Pleydell. "I can hardly realise it now. Then, of course, Louisa knew!"

"Of course. I can quite understand now why she was so nervous the first time I met him there. It certainly is a most wonderful disguise."

"The colour of the skin!"

"Yes, you know what a clear, fresh complexion my father had; that, of course, is stained; then that short, stubby beard, instead of his clean-shaven face, alters him immensely;

of course, that is dyed black, and that black hair is a wig; you know he was quite bald; the only things he could not change were his eyes. And now, Aunt Grace, what do you advise? What am I to do?"

"Of course you will tell him what you have discovered?"

"Of course. But after that? I cannot lend myself to a fraud. I cannot go on as a member of the firm and see sums which belong to the creditors expended on entertainments in Belgrave Square."

"Then what do you propose doing?"

"That is just what at present I cannot tell; I cannot denounce my father, and give him up to certain conviction and imprisonment. On the other hand, I cannot join him in defrauding the creditors. I am on the horns of a dilemma, and he knew perfectly well that I should be so if ever I discovered his secret."

"But, if these two men know it, how can he ever be safe?"

"He never can feel so, but—I don't know,

Aunt Grace, if it is very unfeeling—but I cannot pity him. If he had only been honest and straightforward he would never have been in this most painful position, with discovery and disgrace hanging over his head by a single hair. But I could not be the one to cause the blow to fall.”

“No, no, of course not. Suppose you insisted—you can speak with authority, Tom, for you have the *power* of exposing him—that you insisted on whatever proportion of the receipts you think right being given into your hands for the creditors? That seems to me the only practicable arrangement. And the house in Belgrave Square—that can be sold at once.”

“But suppose he refuses?”

“You mean that he will be sure that you would not betray him?”

“Yes, and then his wife’s influence, she will be furious at the money being diverted into another channel.”

“But can you suggest any other plan?”

"No, I cannot. And it is feeling that, and that this one will most likely fail, that makes me feel so desperate. If I cannot prevail I must leave England."

"Not without consideration, Tom. Think for a moment. How infinitely better off the creditors are now, with nearly all your share of the proceeds of the firm going to them, than if you were to go away and leave the whole in—in your father's hands."

"There is something in that, certainly," said Tom, musingly.

"A good deal, I think."

"But still, Aunt Grace, I *couldn't* stay and countenance the imposture, the fraud. Think! Could I?"

"I would do nothing precipitately, and make no rash decisions. Do you think it would do any good my expostulating with Mrs. Francia? It might have a good effect that she should know that I know the whole story."

Tom sat and considered for some time.

"I almost think it might. Would it be better you should speak at the same time that I do, or before?"

Mrs. Pleydell paused.

"I don't think they ought to be able to confer together afterwards. Suppose you tell me when you are to have your interview at the office, and send me a telegram 'Yes' if he agrees to your plan, 'No' if he refuses. If the latter I would go to Park Street at once."

"You have something of the conspirator's instinct in you, Aunt Grace," said Tom, with a faint smile: "I cannot improve upon your idea, of course you will tell no one."

"Of course not."

"I almost despair, I confess."

"Never despair, Tom—always hope."

He smiled sadly.

"You did not say that to me about Eve, Aunt Grace."

“Because I always knew there *was* nothing to hope, Tom. And, now that she is going to be married so soon, I do trust you will soon shake off the fancy.”

“Married !”

He sank into a seat and turned so deadly white that Mrs. Pleydell’s heart smote her for her abruptness.

“I thought you knew. I have expected it some time, and forgot that it was only settled the day before yesterday. Yes, she marries Mr. Urban in July.”

“God grant she may be happy !”

He was beginning to look more like himself, and his aunt laid her hand on his arm.

“Forgive me, Tom, I ought not to have been so abrupt.”

He raised her hand to his lips.

“You are always kind to me, Aunt Grace, I was foolish—I knew it must come some time. Now I will go. I am not in tune for congratu-

lating Eve to-day; besides, there is a lot of business awaiting me; the clerks must be wondering where I am. *He* comes back to-morrow. I will speak to him on Monday morning and let you have the telegram. I am afraid you will have to help me."

On the Monday morning when Mr. Francia walked into his private office, he was surprised to find Tom awaiting. Generally the junior partner sat in his own room, and only made his appearance when sent for.

"Good morning, Pleydell, very hot, isn't it? The dog days come before their time, eh? What is it this morning? anything of consequence? I have an unusual quantity of correspondence to get through."

"It is of the first consequence, Mr.—Francia," with an intentional pause before the name, "it is respecting one of the letters that arrived in your absence," and he placed the letter before him.

Even beneath the skilfully stained skin it

was easy to see that Mr. Francia paled as he read, but he tried to laugh it off.

"A queer attempt at extortion," he said, "curious, Pleydell, it should have been addressed to me, not to you. I fancy the wisest plan is to take no notice of it."

"Do you deny its truth, father?" said Tom.

Mr. Francia started violently.

"You don't mean to say, Pleydell," he said, quickly, "that you for a moment believe this cock-and-bull story? It is too absurd! Why, in the name of common sense, were two people ever more unlike? Think of his fair skin and fair hair and whiskers! it is too ridiculous."

"But your dark skin does not accord with your very light blue eyes, and," here he suddenly approached his companion, and before he could defend himself twitched off his wig; "here above your left ear is the scar of the stone where you fell from your pony as a boy, and

that you have often shown me. Oh, father! father! why have you done this thing?" and he covered his face with his hands.

"Come, Tom," said his father: "don't make a fuss. What after all is there to make yourself miserable about? Surely it is much better for me to come back and live comfortably in my own country with my own wife? I did think of sending for her to America, but I was afraid it would be a clue to my identity; besides, I don't think American society would suit her. Come, Tom, you don't mean to say you're sorry to see me back again."

He laid his hand on his son's and looked up into his face with a smile, but Tom withdrew his hand and did not smile in return.

"I am very glad indeed to see you again, but not in this way."

"Bless me, boy, what is it you want of me?"

"Father, you know very well. You know

what I said to you when, as Mr. Francia, you took me into partnership at Christmas. I told you I must decline living in any way that by making a show could advance the interests of the firm, because every sixpence I could spare from the absolute necessities of life must be devoted to retrieving my father's name. You said you quite understood my feeling and honoured it, and yet—you are embarking on a large house in Belgrave Square, and a pretentious style of living. I cannot and I will not aid and abet such dishonesty."

"What do you mean?"

Mr. Pleydell looked considerably disturbed.

"You know quite well that one word would consign you to a felon's cell."

"Yes, but a son could hardly whisper that word of his father."

"Yes, if that father refuses to make the restitution in his power."

"Tom, be reasonable. Talk sense if you can instead of heroics, and tell me what it is you want me to do."

“I want you,” said Tom, standing before him and looking him straight in the eyes, “to sell the house you have just bought in Belgrave Square, and to apply the money and all the surplus profits of the business to the purpose of paying off to the uttermost farthing the people you defrauded. I ask you to do this through me, as then no suspicion will fall upon yourself. It will entail upon you no privation, for Mrs. Pleydell’s settlement is ample for all your wants.”

“But, my dear Tom, you are very unreasonable. We have got the house in Belgrave Square, and want to enjoy it.”

“And can you enjoy anything with the knowledge of the many you have injured preying upon your mind? Can you know a moment’s peace while two men, like the writer of this letter, and the other whom you went to Liverpool to bribe, are the possessors of your secret? Every year their demands will increase, and that is not the worst of it. You are never sure that, in an unguarded moment,

under the potent influence of the cocktails and eye-openers of American bars, they may not let slip your secret. But do as I urge you; work heartily to make restitution, and before very long you may venture again to be known by your own name, and it will be realized that you came back under an assumed one the better to indemnify those you had caused to suffer. If you do as I suggest, in three years' time Francia and Pleydell may be known as Pleydell and Son, and the romance of your return under an assumed name will be told in your favour instead of to your disgrace."

"But," said Mr. Pleydell, peevishly, "this is all very fine, but for the present I lose all my pleasure, and have to slave at business for no return. It is all very well for a young man like you to talk coolly of three years' time; you are young and can afford to wait; now every year will take from my power of enjoyment. Besides, one of your arguments is very feeble. You talk of the danger of Joyce or Behrend betraying me; that will be just as

great if I pay away all my money as you wish."

"Their power of exacting black mail will be materially curtailed: it will only be for a period of three or four years, instead of for the term of your life. Besides, supposing that they did denounce you, if your creditors found that by allowing you to trade as Francia they were having what they have all regarded as hopelessly bad debts steadily paid off, they would be far too wise to move in the matter, but would steadily ignore your identity. Your acceptance of the suggestion I make is the only condition on which I will remain with you."

"Tom, you do not mean that you, my only child, would turn against me!"

Tom hesitated: he almost feared that nothing but the fear of being denounced to the police would induce his father to agree to his terms, yet he could not deliberately say what was not true. So he answered, slowly,

“Not to the extent of betraying your secret, but I should retire from the firm and leave England never to return.”

“Nonsense! where would you go?”

“I do not know and should not care, but my decision is irrevocable.”

“I would do as you wish,” said Mr. Pleydell, in a complaining tone; “I really would, Tom, though I think you are quixotic, and go too far and ask too much; but you see—there is Mrs. Pleydell to be considered. She has quite set her heart on eclipsing all that she did in Hyde Park Gardens by her entertainments in Belgrave Square.”

“Does she know the danger of exposure? That there are two unscrupulous and greedy men in your confidence?”

“No, I can’t say that she does.”

“Tell her that, and that my plan will bring a speedy release from their terrorism. If that does not suffice, let Aunt Grace talk to her.”

“Your Aunt Grace! Good Heavens, Tom! are you mad? How can you talk so coolly of taking a woman into our confidence?”

“I have done so. Aunt Grace knows all, but she is a person who is thoroughly to be trusted. If Mrs. Pleydell will not listen to you, let Aunt Grace try her powers of persuasion.”

“Well,” said Mr. Pleydell, in a weary tone; “I suppose I must give in to you. I could not bear your going from me in my old age. Yes, Tom, it is very hard, but I will do what you wish.”

“My dear father,” cried Tom, wringing his hand; “you have made me very happy. I will work night and day to make the time as short as possible till you are free.”

“But I shall never go back to the old name. I have no fancy for being a nine days’ wonder; Francia I am and Francia I shall remain all the rest of my life.”

“There will be plenty of time to settle that,”

said Tom, and he left the room with a light heart, to send to his aunt the unexpected telegram, "Yes!"

CHAPTER X.

She was his life,
 The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
 Which terminated all.

The Dream. BYRON.

Earth holds no other like to thee,
 Or if it doth, in vain for me.

The Giaour. BYRON.

A GOOD deal of Mrs. Pleydell's persuasion was required to induce Mrs. Francia to accede to Tom's views of the situation. She had greatly looked forward to beginning once more her career as a fashionable hostess with the advantage of a house in Belgrave Square and the acquaintance of some of Mrs. Pleydell's Netherleigh connections, and it was a great

mortification to find herself doomed to remain in her pretty but small house in Park Street, and to derive no advantage from her husband's very flourishing business.

Mrs. Pleydell contrived to say as much as possible of the danger of the two American accomplices, and succeeded in making her sister-in-law thoroughly nervous and uncomfortable on that score, but the greatest success was effected by a perfectly casual remark which Mrs. Francia at once interpreted as meaning that Mrs. Pleydell, in case of her refusal to do as Tom wished, would not consider herself bound to keep the secret. Of course nothing was really further from Mrs. Pleydell's intention, but seeing the effect of the belief she did not think it necessary to contradict it, and eventually extracted a somewhat sullen assent.

"It is done, Tom," said Mrs. Pleydell, when he came to see her that afternoon; "I am very glad. I confess at one time I despaired. And after all my success is due to a miscon-

ception ;” and she repeated to him the speech which Mrs. Francia had understood as implying an immediate intention of informing Lady Beechmont of the facts.

“Well, so long as it is settled, it does not matter,” said Tom, “we never could have done without you, Aunt Grace. Do you know, now that it is settled, I really believe my father feels it to be a relief.”

“Yes, I daresay. But of course you have still to bribe those Americans?”

“Yes, until we have cleared off the debts—then we can defy them to do their worst, and they are not likely to get very extortionate before that time.”

A fortnight, during which Eve and her trousseau, her congratulations, and her presents kept the house in a constant bustle, had passed since Lady Imogene’s marriage, and Lord Rootley’s departure. It seemed at least two months to Iris, who missed him more and more every day, and felt that all the going out which she had so greatly en-

joyed when she met him everywhere, was flat, stale, and unprofitable.

She took care not to betray the fact, however. Her mother, she knew, thought that society was good for her, and would be both surprised and disappointed if she avowed herself tired of what she had at first so greatly enjoyed. Besides, her mother would naturally seek for some reason, and Iris shrank with horror from the thought of her guessing the real one. She had, as she told herself, no reason to believe that her preference for Lord Rootley was returned. He had talked to her so much because they were interested in the same subjects, and also because she was a friend of Lady Imogene's, but she had no reason to believe that there was anything further in his feeling for her.

It was true that, when he took leave of her, his manner and the words, "Say you will be glad to see me when I come back," had made her heart beat high with the hope that he cared for her, though at that time

she hardly realized how much she cared for him; but now that his voice was no longer in her ears, that his dark eyes no longer made her colour rise and her heart beat, she had learnt to fancy that she had exaggerated his meaning; that his farewell was, after all, but that of an intimate friend. She must be doubly on her guard on his return, lest any evidence of her feelings should escape her, and he should fancy she had attached a meaning to his words which he had never intended.

But very possibly he would not return to London. He was sure to find a great deal to do at Pinefield, and it was not likely he would leave it before Lady Imogene's visit. She would not be there till three weeks after her marriage, and would probably stay a fortnight, and by that time it would hardly be worth while to come back to town. And then as Lady Beechmont had announced that Coalshire did not agree with her, which was her way of saying that she found it dull, in all

probability they should not meet again for ages, and, before they did, he would have forgotten her, or very probably married some one else.

Even if he did come down to stay with Lady Imogene, Elmhurst was a very long way from the Gate House, and it was most likely that they should not meet. And, having decided that the sooner she made up her mind to this the better, she began to fulfil her intention by dwelling on every word he had ever spoken to her, his last words being repeated again and again.

Meanwhile, Lord Rootley was also in a very disturbed state. Of course he was less to be pitied than Iris, for he had a good deal of business which he was obliged to get through, and which served in a measure to occupy his thoughts, but, in his solitary evenings, Iris, and Iris only, was the subject of his meditations.

It was true that he believed that he had every ground for hope: her agitation when

he wished her good-bye could, he thought, have but one meaning. Still he could not be sure—perhaps she might not have understood him. What a fool he had been to leave town without knowing his fate! Half a dozen times at least during the first ten days of his stay at Pinefield he was on the point of rushing up to London to ask the question on which all his hopes of happiness depended, but he forced himself to remain.

He had settled in his own mind when he went down that he would remain away a fortnight, and he forced himself to complete his allotted period. If he was right and there were hope for him, he would not, as he very sensibly told himself, impair his chance by remaining absent for so short a period, while if he were doomed to disappointment—it was, at any rate, something to have a little longer to hope.

Perhaps the objects of his journey suffered somewhat by his pre-occupation. The clergyman, agent, and others with whom his business

had to be transacted, all observed that he hardly seemed so interested in the work as usual, and that it was often necessary to tell him things more than once, thus showing that his attention could hardly have been fully given to the first recital.

At length the end of the fortnight came; he would have been ashamed to confess how he had counted the hours of that last week which had seemed to him never ending; he knew that that night there was a ball at a house where he was sure to meet her—there he should learn his fate.

His family happened to dine at home that night, and his mother and Hildegarde gave him a great deal of miscellaneous information. As has been before said, they were not good correspondents, and a few lines from his father in answer to letters on business were all that had reached him while he remained at Pinefield.

One piece of information astonished him greatly.

“Only think,” said Lady Hildegarde, “just conceive that Eve Pleydell’s luck. Claud Urban came down to us at Beechmont for the New Year’s ball, fell desperately in love with her, followed her to Rome when they ran off in such a hurry to let the row about Iris and Laurence Furnivall blow over, and they are to be married the second week in July.”

“I must say I was surprised,” said Lady Beechmont, languidly ; “I wonder what he saw in her. He might have done so very much better,” and she glanced involuntarily at her daughter.

Lord Rootley was surprised. He quite remembered all the episodes of Mr. Urban’s visit under an assumed name to Coalshire, and wondered much that he should have ventured to stay at Beechmont under his own name : there must surely have been some danger of recognition.

He was heartily glad that the danger which had at one time appeared to him imminent of Mr. Urban’s marrying Hildegarde was averted ;

but he did not feel very comfortable respecting Eve. What had become of the lady who had lived at the cottage and been known as Mrs. Esmond? He must warn Iris, it would never do to let Eve marry without some investigation. For, as Lady Hildegarde spoke of Mr. Urban's visit to Beechmont as his first meeting with Eve, it was to be presumed that she had said nothing of his identity with the man she met in secret on the river.

But he had not time that evening to give very many thoughts to Eve and her concerns. It seemed to him as if time stood still, as if the hour would never come at which it was possible to go to a ball. His mother and Hildegarde were going to two or three other places first, and wanted him to come with them, but his impatience was too great, and he declined.

"You can't go yet; you'll help to light the candles," said Lady Hildegarde, laughing.

He certainly was very early, and he had a long time to wait before his eyes were rejoiced

by the sight of Iris's stately figure following her mother into the room. They were alone, for Eve had gone to bed with a headache, the only malady to which she ever seemed subject.

He stood for a few minutes unseen, watching Iris. He thought he had never seen her look so handsome, but—was it fancy, and was it the case that she seemed somewhat pensive and out of spirits? Certainly there was a sort of weariness in her manner which he had never observed before. Dare he hope that this was a favourable omen for him? that it was caused by his absence? that she was thinking of him? It was with the hope in his heart that it was so, that he stepped forward and stood before her.

Iris gave a violent start, and her face and neck became crimson, but she recovered herself very quickly, and contrived to say, with very tolerable composure,

“Lord Rootley, this is a surprise! I thought you were to be at Pinefield at least six weeks.”

He made no direct answer, but, when the dance for which he asked was accorded to him, he led her straight away from the dancers into a tiny conservatory which happened to be vacant. There he took in his the hand that rested on his arm.

"Miss Netherleigh," he said, "do you remember the question I asked you when we parted?"

She blushed and looked down, answering, in a very low voice,

"Yes, I think so."

"I asked you if you would be glad to see me when I came back, and you said 'Yes.' Are you?"

"Yes," in a still lower voice.

"It depends solely on you whether I go away again."

"On me?" But, though she asked the question, Iris could not affect any doubt of his meaning.

"Yes, on you. Iris dear, you know what I mean, that I love you with my whole heart,

that I want you to be my own dear wife. You will, won't you? Your eyes say yes."

Her tongue could not, but she put her hand into his.

"God bless you, dear," he said, quietly. "He knows that, if you are not happy, it shall not be my fault."

"I have no fear," whispered Iris.

It was a very happy time that they spent in that tiny conservatory, though neither spoke much, and they were quite unaware how long they stayed there.

Mrs. Pleydell, who had no suspicion of the state of the case, and who was not accustomed to Iris's remaining long away from her side, was very considerably puzzled; but, when at last she saw them approaching her, she did not need to be told what had occurred. Lord Rootley's proud look of proprietorship and Iris's blushes told their own tale.

Mrs. Pleydell was more glad than she could say. Here was a man to whom she could entrust her child without any of the misgivings

as to suitability and her future happiness that had always troubled her even at the happiest period of her engagement to Laurence. But of course nothing could be said at present, and she could only give Iris a look which the girl well understood.

Mrs. Pleydell was a happy woman as she sat meditating on what had occurred, after assuring Lord Rootley that she should be glad to see him the next morning. This was indeed a happy ending to all her fears respecting the effect that Laurence's desertion would have upon Iris.

It had been a painful blow to her, of course, for the time, but how infinitely greater was her prospect of happiness now than it had been before! Lord Rootley was not merely in love with her, he appreciated her; they cared for the same things, and would have all their interests in common. It was all her heart could wish. How pleased Aunt Rachel would be!

Iris was eager to go home as early as pos-

sible. She had danced two or three times with Lord Rootley, but she did not wish to make herself conspicuous, and the dances with others were a weariness to her. She was glad when, with a last lingering pressure of the hand, he put her into the carriage, and in the darkness she laid her head on her mother's shoulder.

"My darling, I am more than glad for you."

"Oh, mamma, I am so happy!"

"I knew it, dear; your face told me."

"Mamma, there is only one thing—you don't think me very fickle—you don't think it possible that—some day he may think so?"

"Certainly not, dear. Your love died because you could not esteem the person for whom you had felt it; it was certainly not you who were fickle."

They reached home, and with a fond kiss Mrs. Pleydell wished Iris good night. She would not let her come into her room, saying laughingly that if she did they should neither

of them get any sleep, and should be perfect scarecrows when Lord Rootley made his appearance in the morning.

Eve was apt to be very late in the morning, more especially on the rare occasions when she had had a headache the day before. There was nothing to incline her to be early this morning, for Claud was gone out of town for the day to see a horse of which he had heard, and which he thought would suit her.

It was nearly one o'clock when she sauntered into the drawing-room and found her mother alone. Lord Rootley had had a very satisfactory interview, having been able to announce the complete satisfaction of his father and mother at his choice. Lord Beechmont had declared that nothing could possibly have given him greater pleasure, and had already suggested assigning Beechmont to the young people as a residence. Lord Rootley had now carried Iris off to Grosvenor Square, that she might be received in due form as a daughter.

"Well, mummy," said Eve, yawning, "what

sort of a ball was it last night? It was an awful bore missing it."

"How is your head this morning?"

"Oh! all right, only I feel very tired and stupid. Did anything particular happen?"

"Yes, something very particular, and that gives me the greatest pleasure. Iris is going to be married."

"Iris! Whom to? Mr. Thornham, I suppose."

"No, to Lord Rootley."

"Lord Rootley!" and Eve's face clouded over. "I thought he was safe down in Firshire. Why did he come back?"

"To ask Iris to marry him, I suppose."

"Well, she hasn't lost any time in consoling herself, at any rate. I should have thought she might have waited a little longer."

"Happily, Eve, your opinion is of little consequence, but, for your own sake, I should advise you to keep it to yourself."

Eve said no more, but sat in gloomy and sulky meditation. What would be the result

to herself of Lord Rootley's return? Would he tell Iris of the identity of Claud and Mr. Esmond, and, if he did, would she think it necessary to make mischief? Yes, that of course she would, in revenge for Eve's having robbed her of Laurence.

Of course she would be spiteful about anything so mortifying, though she ought to thank her stars for the good luck that had enabled her to make such an infinitely better marriage. Still, if Iris once knew the secret, there was no hope of her keeping it. She would talk about "duty," and "her conscience," and go straight to her mother. The only hope was to work on Lord Rootley's good nature, and there was just the chance that they would have been too much occupied with their own affairs for him to have told Iris yet.

She schemed in vain for an opportunity of speaking to him alone; he dined with them that night, but he had neither eyes nor ears for anyone but Iris, and when he attended them to a ball he simply stood still when not dancing

with her. At length Eve grew desperate and asked him point-blank to dance with her, adding, in a low tone,

“There is something I must say to you.”

He looked surprised, but of course he could not refuse. After the first turn, she drew back into a quiet corner.

“Of course you know,” she said, quickly, “that I am engaged to Mr. Urban?”

“Yes, Hildegard told me.”

“Well, you remember speaking to me about him when—when he was staying at the cottage?”

“As Mr. Esmond? Yes. You made me a promise; did you keep it?”

“For a little; but—there were circumstances—I couldn’t help myself. Now what I want of you is not to tell Iris or anyone that Claud was ever called Mr. Esmond or stayed at the cottage. If you do there’ll be such a row.”

He paused for a moment.

“I am afraid I could not have given the

promise you require," he said, gravely, "even if it had been in my power; there were circumstances about Mr. Urban's visit to Coalshire which, in your own interest, ought to be investigated and——"

"You mean the rumour that he was married," said Eve, eagerly. "I know all about that. She was his sister—Mrs. Esmond, the widow of his cousin. She was out of her mind, and he was taking care of her, and now she is worse, and in a lunatic asylum. Now do promise me not to say anything to Iris—she will make such mischief."

"Whatever Iris does," he replied, coldly, "she will never voluntarily make mischief, though, of course, she will think it right to let Mrs. Pleydell know the truth. I told her of Mr. Urban's identity to-day."

"Then there's an end of everything," observed Eve; and she said not another word till the dance was concluded.

As Lord Rootley said, he had told Iris of Claud's identity.

“I say, Iris,” he observed, when there was a pause in the discussion of their own concerns, “when did Eve tell your mother about her flirtation with Urban on the river?”

“What do you mean?” asked Iris, looking surprised. “Mr. Urban came to Beechmont just at the time of the skating, and they fell in love at once.”

“Then she never has told! I fancied as much. Iris, she used to meet him on the river in the autumn. He was staying at Sir John Dibbleton’s cottage under the name of Esmond.”

Iris looked aghast, and turned very pale.

“Esmond!” she exclaimed. “Oh! it can’t be! Surely you must be mistaken.”

“Not I—I know Mr. Urban fairly well. I saw Eve with him under the oak at the cottage, and I spoke to her, telling her that Esmond was not his real name—which, by the way, she then believed it to be—and exacted a promise from her not to see him again without your mother’s knowledge, on pain of my

telling Mrs. Pleydell all that I had seen."

"And she promised?"

"Yes, reluctantly, but she promised."

"And broke it—Mr. Furnivall saw her with him too, and told me. I knew you had spoken to her," and Iris proceeded to relate the story of Eve's journey to London, and all the rest of the Esmond episode. "Now what am I to do?" she asked, piteously. "I would give anything not to interfere in Eve's concerns, but it would not be right to mamma; and besides, if he could be so deceitful as to meet Eve as a stranger, and pretend to fall in love with her again, he might—— Rootley, do you think it possible he—he *was* married?"

He paused a moment, and said slowly,

"Possible, but I think far from probable. He evidently intends to marry Eve now, and I do not think he is likely to put himself in the way of being tried for bigamy."

"But if I tell mamma—she has declared positively that nothing shall ever induce her to allow Eve to marry Mr. Esmond—the mar-

riage will be broken off, and Eve will be miserable."

"But that does not alter the question of right and wrong, dear. All you have to ask yourself is what it is *right* to do, not what you would like."

"It isn't because I dislike it, but my horror of making mischief."

"Suppose silence made matters worse? Suppose the handsome gipsy with the pony-carriage were Mrs. Urban? It would not be mischief then to break off the marriage."

"No, of course not. We come back, as usual, to your favourite motto, '*Fais ce que dois advienne que pourra.*' I will tell mamma to-morrow morning."

"That is right, Iris."

"Poor mamma! it will be a great trouble to her. She likes Mr. Urban so much, and she was so happy thinking Eve had chosen well, and would be so safe with him."

"I should think Eve was rather a trouble to her. Iris, I have a confession to make.

Once, when I first knew her—before I knew you, darling—I very nearly, not quite, fell in love with Eve. Luckily, I was wise in time.”

“There must be some affinity between us,” said Iris, smiling; “it was love for her that took Mr. Furnivall away from me.”

“He could love her *after* knowing you! Well, Iris, I owe Eve a debt of gratitude I can never hope to repay.”

CHAPTER XI.

Heaven knows how loth I am to part from thee ;
 So from the seal is soften'd wax disjoin'd,
 So from the mother-plant the under rind.

DRYDEN.

“**I**RIS, you must surely be dreaming! You cannot mean that Mr. Urban is Mr. Esmond? That he actually had the audacity, when I was going to tell him about the adventure, to stop me and say that Eve had told him everything.”

“Do you think it is likely that she would have told him everything if he had not known it, mamma?”

“Well, I confess I did not expect it of her, and it surprised me very much. But his conduct is positively monstrous. Of course the marriage must be broken off.”

“Oh, mamma, do you think that is absolutely necessary? It will make such a fuss, and I really do think she does care for him.”

“I don’t like the fuss any better than you do, Iris, but to let her marry him is quite impossible. A child who requires such careful guidance cannot be given over to the care of anyone so manifestly devoid of principle. Besides, you know the rumour that he was married, that must be cleared up.”

“As Eve knew of that, he must of course have been able to explain it to her satisfaction. Don’t you think, mamma, that, if he satisfies you that it was all right, you might forgive him and let things go on quietly?”

“No, Iris, I do not. I really could not reconcile it to my conscience.”

“But indeed I think she is fond of him.

Don't you think that marrying anyone she loves is the best hope for her?"

"You are a skilful advocate, Iris, and there is something in what you say, but I cannot consent to an immediate marriage; there must be some probation."

"Six months would be enough, mamma, would it not?"

"No, a year at the very least. I really don't think," Mrs. Pleydell spoke, for her, almost fretfully, "that you at all realize the enormity of the deception! Remember that I myself wrote to this man telling him that with my consent he should never see my daughter again, and that he and Eve have absolutely duped me into admitting him as a constant companion, and even accepting him as a son-in-law! It is of no use your pleading, Iris, it is very amiable of you, but I cannot listen."

"I am so sorry you should be so worried," said Iris, stooping down and kissing her mother's cheek.

“Go now, dear, and send me Eve.”

“Shall I tell her you know?”

“No, you had better not.”

But when Iris tapped at her sister's door, and, putting in her head, said, “Mamma wants to speak to you in the drawing-room at once,” Eve immediately knew what had happened, and said sneeringly,

“Oh! I suppose you've been telling tales and making mischief again.”

Iris did not reply; the soft answer which is popularly supposed to turn away wrath had never the smallest effect upon Eve.

“I really can't see why you should be so spiteful,” the girl continued, angrily, “anyone else would have been obliged to me for freeing them from a clod like Laurence, and leaving them free for such an infinitely better match, to say nothing of having enjoyed yourself in Rome all the winter, which you'd never have done but for me. But you can't be thankful for or satisfied with your own good luck, but must upset mine. And then I suppose you'll

talk about your 'duty' and your 'conscience!' How I hate goody people!"

"Mamma is waiting, Eve, you had better go at once," was all that Iris said, and she shut herself into her own room.

Poor Mrs. Pleydell had not a pleasant interview with her youngest daughter. Being very angry and not a little unhappy, Eve was extremely cross, abused Iris and Lord Rootley violently, and absolutely refused to listen to her mother's representations of how very bad her conduct had been.

"She would marry Claud on the 12th of July, no matter what anyone said," and, when told that she was a minor and could not do as she pleased, she rejoined that at any rate she was not going to stay at home to be bullied, she should go to Aunt Louisa, she was sure that she and Mr. Francia would be kind to her.

At length, quite worn out, her mother sent her to her own room, and gave orders to

Rogers to see that she remained there. She felt there was hardly any folly that Eve was not at that moment capable of committing.

Of course Eve had given Claud's version of the lady who had accompanied him to Coalshire, but it sounded to Mrs. Pleydell so very melodramatic that she felt doubtful as to its credibility, and awaited with considerable impatience Mr. Urban's arrival.

When he came, she greeted him distinctly with—

“Good morning, Mr. Esmond.”

He started violently.

“You are surprised to find that your fraud is discovered.”

“Fraud is a strong word, Mrs. Pleydell.”

“Hardly too strong, I think, Mr.—is it to be Urban, or Esmond?”

“Both are my names,” he said, shortly. “Esmond was my mother's name, and is my second Christian name. However, I think we had better say Urban.”

"As you please. Of course, Mr. Urban, you must be aware that your marriage with my daughter cannot take place."

"Why not?"

He spoke as coolly as if they were discussing the most trivial matter.

"I should have thought it was hardly necessary to ask. Even if I could overlook the gross deception, you must remember that when I returned your letters I told you that I could not allow you ever again to approach Eve. Besides, there is the unexplained fact that when you were at Oak Cottage you were supposed to be married."

"I can easily explain that," and he proceeded to relate exactly the story which Mrs. Pleydell had already heard from Eve.

"It is a very remarkable story," she said, drily.

He turned upon her indignantly.

"You don't mean to say you doubt my word?"

"I should certainly require ample verifica-

tion. You can hardly be surprised, I think, when you consider the fraud that you have practised, and caused my daughter to practise upon me. Perhaps you may remember that in this very room you told me that Eve had confessed to you all about Mr. Esmond. After such a statement, how am I ever to believe anything you may say?"

"But you forget. I never *said* anything of the kind. I merely let you believe it. I only said I knew all about Mr. Esmond, and that certainly is true."

"You cannot, I think, be surprised that I can no longer countenance your marriage."

"But I am very much—— Look here, Mrs. Pleydell, it is a matter of common sense. I love Eve, or I should not have taken all the trouble I have to keep the name of Esmond from your ears. Eve, I think, loves me. I am sure I can make her happy, and you know I can give her good settlements. Surely it would be very unreasonable to

throw away a well-assorted and suitable marriage just for a temporary anger at our having been able to keep our own counsel?"

He was certainly cool and audacious enough, and Mrs. Pleydell almost gasped for breath, but she replied,

"Mr. Urban, I look upon marriage as a much more serious matter than you do. It is of far more consequence to me that the man my daughter marries should be good, honest, and honourable, than that he should be rich. And how can I possibly trust you? You have deceived me for six months; how do I know that, after marriage, you might not deceive Eve, and wreck the happiness of her life? You spoke well enough the other day of taking care of her, but what will be the care of a man so devoid of principle as you have shown yourself? Eve's character wants strengthening and elevating; what sign can I find in your conduct that you are to be trusted even to attempt to improve her?"

Marriage means, for a girl with so little steadiness as Eve, either possible elevation or certain deterioration, and I do not see on what grounds you can claim to be her mentor."

"Do you think nothing of our love?" he asked, imploringly.

"Do you call it love to encourage a girl deliberately to deceive her mother?"

"All is fair in love."

"Many sins have been committed under the shadow of that silly saying. If you loved Eve truly, you would not have endeavoured morally to injure her."

"Look here, Mrs. Pleydell," said Claud, "it's of no use your talking metaphysics like that to me. I love Eve and she loves me, and I don't think you can be so cruel as to say we shan't marry. What does Eve say?"

"Eve is not in the least ashamed of the deception," owned Mrs. Pleydell, reluctantly.

“I didn’t think she would be ; she arranged it all. Now surely you can’t make us both miserable. I’m quite ready to say that I’m very sorry you should be so annoyed, and to promise you that, bad as your opinion is of me, I really will take the greatest care of my darling little Eve.”

Mrs. Pleydell was silent, and after a pause he went on :

“ You know Eve is neither happy nor easy to manage at home ; I feel sure she will be both with me. At any rate, you cannot know to the contrary.”

“ There can be no true love without esteem, and Eve can never respect you, her accomplice in deception.”

“ ‘No love without esteem’ sounds like Sir Charles Grandison ; I am sure it never once entered Eve’s pretty little head to think of esteeming me ; but she loves me very much.”

“ And, with no secure basis, why should you think it would last ?”

"I'll take my chance of that. Come, Mrs. Pleydell, say you forgive us, and that all shall go smooth."

"I will concede this much," said Mrs. Pleydell, after a pause, "if you are both in the same mind in a year's time, and if you perfectly satisfy me as to the truth of the story respecting Mrs. Esmond, I will give my consent. It must be clearly understood that there is no engagement. It is no use your protesting," as he began a hasty speech; "my decision is irrevocable. She must give you back your ring. The only alternative is your marriage being definitely broken off."

Claud Urban was not accustomed to be thwarted, he felt very angry, but he saw that Mrs. Pleydell meant what she said, and that it was of no use combating her decision. Besides, an idea struck him of something that might be arranged with Eve, and he should be debarred from all communication with her unless he at any rate seemed to bow to her mother's decree. So he said,

“Well, Mrs. Pleydell, I really think it is very hard, but of course the power is in your hands. As to giving Eve up that is out of the question. So I suppose we must agree to wait for this interminable year, unless you relent before it is over. As to my poor sister, you will have no difficulty in assuring yourself of the absolute truth of her sad story. Now may *I* tell Eve of your decree? Perhaps I can make it seem less hard to her, poor child, than it does to me.”

“I will send her to you,” said Mrs. Pleydell, leaving the room.

She was by no means satisfied with the result of the interview. She was angry with herself for her own weakness in yielding when she had been so disposed to dismiss him for ever; and he had certainly shown no proper penitence, or even sense of the enormity of his conduct.

Was it possible that she could have been so weak as to yield because he had reminded her how difficult Eve was to manage at home, and

she had realised how much worse she would be if this love affair were definitely put an end to? She hoped not, and yet it certainly looked very like it.

If dear Aunt Rachel were only in reach! What she would give for a quiet hour's talk and the opportunity of listening to her common sense views! Talking was so different from writing. It would take a volume to express all she wanted to say, and even then it might not be fully comprehensible, whereas an hour's talk would make all clear.

Mrs. Pleydell did not say anything respecting what had passed to Eve, but merely told her that Mr. Urban was in the drawing-room and would like to see her. She ran quickly downstairs.

"Well, Claud, you know Iris has been making mischief. What did mummy say? Was she very angry?"

"Well, yes. She preached me a very long sermon."

"But you have made it all right?"

“Not quite, but better than I thought it was going to be at one time. But we have been very naughty children, Eve, and we are not to be let off our punishment.”

“Do be serious, Claud. What did she say?”

“A great deal of virtuous indignation which you would not care to hear, indeed I daresay you have had it already. Then the decree is that we are to disengage ourselves, that you are to give me back my ring—this was particularly specified,—and that if a year hence we are both in the same mind she will not oppose us.”

Eve burst into tears. He knelt down by her and put his arm round her waist.

“Don’t cry, my sweet, little bird; after all, you know, we shall be all the same to each other, though we *are* disengaged, and, sad as it is, a year will soon pass.”

“Oh, it is very easy for you!” sobbed Eve. “You can go about, and be amused, and enjoy yourself, and the time will go very quickly.

But think of my life at home with mummy, being scolded, and preached at, and told to improve my mind all day long. A whole year! I shall die or go mad long before that. Oh! Claud, if you cared for me only half as much as you say you do, you never, never would have agreed."

"My dear Eve, I fought as well as I could, but you know how cool and imperturbable your mother is; I might as well have flung myself against a rock. All I got was that, if I did not agree, our marriage must definitely be broken off. So there was no use in my persevering. You know, half a loaf is better than no bread."

"I know that everything is odious, and that I am miserable," said Eve, plaintively, turning her engagement ring round and round on her finger, and ready to burst into tears again at the mere thought of parting with her beautiful ruby.

He drew her close to him, kissed her fondly and almost whispered,

“My little Eve, there is one way of settling matters in our own way.”

“What is that?” said Eve, raising herself and looking at him with lively interest.

“We might elope, little one. If you have the pluck to venture, I’ll manage it all right.”

“Oh!” was all Eve could say.

The idea for a moment paralysed her, and, before Claud had finished the hurried sketch of his proposed plan, which he hastened to pour into her ear, there came back to her Lady Hildegarde’s words relating to Captain Dev-erell—“It’s all very well being in love, but one knows it won’t last,” “If we eloped, I should have no settlements, no pin-money, and, if he died, I should be left without a jointure.” She heard these words clearly ringing in her ears through Claud’s animated description of his plans, and when at length he paused and said, somewhat triumphantly,

“Well, Eve?”

She stammered,

“Oh, Claud, I’m afraid!—that is, I think—I don’t think it would do at all.”

“Not do? Why, Eve, you don’t mean to say you’re afraid? Not with me, surely? Why, you know I should make everything safe.”

“Oh! yes, I am sure you would, Claud, but I think—that is, I’m sure I couldn’t go through with it.”

“You little goose, why? You’d only have to do just as I tell you.”

“But I couldn’t, Claud, indeed.”

Mr. Urban was very decidedly puzzled. He did not like being thwarted, and his handsome face began to lower. Suddenly the thought occurred to him of what Lady Hildegarde had said to Eve.

It must not be supposed that Eve had betrayed confidence; to do her justice, she was very loyal as to her friend’s secrets. She had not mentioned Captain Deverell’s or Lady Hildegarde’s name, but she had asked him whether it was true that people who eloped

had no settlements, and, on his inquiring what on earth had put such a question into her head, replied that some one had said so, on which he had observed with a laugh that "some one" was wise in her generation, for that certainly, when a man had once got his wife, he was not likely to be so foolish as to hamper himself with settlements.

It began to dawn on him that this was what was in Eve's mind. But it was a very different matter indeed praising the worldly wisdom of some persons unknown, and being himself refused what he wanted for fear settlements should not be forthcoming. How hideously mercenary all women were, to be sure! and his lip curled as he said,

"You are prudent, Eve! I see you have not forgotten your friend's good advice."

Eve saw at once it would never do to let him really believe that this was the truth; so, feeling that she was blushing violently, she assumed a tone of indignation as she exclaimed,

"Claud, how can you? As if I was thinking

of such a thing! I'm sure I'm unhappy enough without your suspecting me of anything so odious!" and she burst into a flood of tears.

He was only half convinced, but he kissed away her tears, and for the present said no more about the elopement. He put the ring which she surrendered with infinite sorrow on his little finger, and vowed it should never leave it till he replaced it on her hand.

When at length he departed, and Mrs. Pleydell, hearing the door close, returned to the drawing-room, she found Eve lying face downwards on the sofa, in such a paroxysm of sobbing that it was some time before she could reply to her mother's attempted soothing.

"Go away! Leave me alone! You hate me or you wouldn't make me so miserable! I hate everyone who has come between me and my darling Claud!"

Eve was persuaded such an utterance would have a great effect, but her mother was too

uncertain whether her sobs proceeded from sorrow or temper to be adequately impressed.

CHAPTER XII.

The world may scoff at "broken hearts,"
 But hearts may broken be ;
 Or bear through life a crushing weight
 Of care and misery.

ANON.

To run away
 From the world's ills, that, at the very worst,
 Will soon blow o'er, thinking to mend ourselves
 By boldly venturing on a world unknown,
 And plunging headlong in the dark!—'tis mad!
 No frenzy half so desperate as this.

The Grave. BLAIR.

THE tidings of Iris's engagement had given
 old Miss Netherleigh infinite satisfaction.
 She had taken a great fancy to Lord Rootley
 from the first moment of seeing him, and was

decidedly grateful to Eve for the mischief she had made, which had saved Iris from what she felt sure would have been a most uncongenial marriage.

“I suppose,” she wrote to Mrs. Pleydell, “that the announcement of Eve’s engagement has been a great shock to Mr. Furnivall, for it seems quite to have changed him. His mother is, I hear, quite in despair; he has announced his intention of selling off his hunters, and of leaving home for two years at least, during which he means to travel. No doubt seeing the world will do him good, and teach him that the master of Rookwood is not quite so important a person as he has always been accustomed to think himself. How curious that such a frivolous little thing as Eve should have worked such mighty results !”

Miss Netherleigh spoke, of course, according to her lights; it was only natural to suppose that Laurence’s sudden determination to go abroad was produced by the engagement of the girl for love of whom he had broken off his

marriage within three weeks of its accomplishment.

But it was not Eve's faithlessness that had determined him. With her calm avowal of the motives that had induced her to encourage him all his love for her had died ; had indeed left in its stead a feeling of positive repulsion. And it was for this heartless, scheming little girl, who was manifestly disappointed that he did not appear crushed to the earth on finding that she did not love him, that he had separated himself from Iris, whom he was fast learning again to think absolute perfection.

If Eve could have seen into his heart, she would almost have been satisfied at the mortification which he felt, not indeed at her desertion, but at his own insane folly.

In his own mind Laurence felt thoroughly humiliated, and to anyone of his disposition, and brought up as he had been, this was the first step towards any improvement. His mother, who thought him and everything he did perfect, was much disturbed at his profound

melancholy on his return from London, which, knowing nothing about Eve, she attributed entirely to Iris, and said many bitter things of her in consequence, more especially when her engagement to Lord Rootley was announced.

It was a mortification to her that another should be preferred to her son, and it made her proportionately bitter. But, when he broke to her the fact that he intended to go abroad, her dismay knew no bounds, and her invectives against Iris were so loud that they reached his ears. And so at last he spoke.

“Mother,” he said, “I must beg that you will never again speak a single word against Miss Netherleigh. In all that has happened she has been absolutely innocent; it is I who have behaved ill, and have been deservedly punished. It was not, as you seem to imagine, any caprice of Miss Netherleigh’s that separated us; she overheard me speaking words of vehement love to another woman, and vowing

that nothing should induce me to fulfil my engagement. You can hardly blame her, I think, for releasing me."

"Laurence, are you serious?"

"Quite. It is scarcely a matter for jest."

"But—then are you engaged to some one else?"

"No."

"But why?"

"Don't ask me, mother; it is a humiliating story, and one I prefer to keep to myself. It is never pleasant to have to own oneself a vain fool. Perhaps now you can understand my desire for change. I should never have told you this, but that I was anxious to prevent you from, in your ignorance, saying a word derogatory to Miss Netherleigh."

"She has consoled herself pretty quickly, at any rate."

"I am not vain enough to fancy that she stands in any need of consolation. Her only feeling for me must be one of contempt, and I

am heartily glad she is going to marry so good a fellow as Rootley; he will suit her far better than I should have done."

"Well, you know, I never did think the marriage a suitable one for you," said his mother; but to this he made no reply, and after a short pause left the room.

A very few mornings after, Iris received a very beautiful bracelet, consisting of a row of large sapphires separating two rows of fine brilliants. On a slip of paper were the words, "With the sincerest wishes for your happiness from one who realises too late what he has lost," and on another scrap, "Please neither refuse this nor thank me for it. Before you receive it I shall have sailed for New York.—L. F."

Iris was much touched, though she could not deny the justice of her mother's observation that "his discovery of the value of what he had lost seemed to date from the time of some one else having appreciated the treasure."

Sir Charles and Lady Netherleigh had made

a great point of Iris's marriage taking place at Netherleigh, and, after a little hesitation, Mrs. Pleydell had agreed. It would certainly be pleasanter not to have it in Coalshire, where Laurence's departure had probably renewed all the gossip of the previous winter, and Netherleigh would be quieter and more agreeable than London.

Lady Netherleigh, who was devoted to Iris, was delighted, and, Aunt Rachel having written to decline being present on account of her age, she and Sir Charles went down for the day to Bannerton, and finally, by their entreaties, overcame her reluctance.

"Iris wouldn't believe herself married without you," said Lady Netherleigh; "and we will take such care of you that you shall not have a chance of being tired. You will be such a comfort to Grace, too; she always seems to look to you for everything."

It was a trial to Mrs. Pleydell to see Netherleigh, the home of which her dearly-loved Arthur had talked so much and with such affec-

tion, for the first time. His image seemed to greet her everywhere, and it was only by a violent effort that she choked back the tears that threatened to blind her.

Her host and hostess, kindly, sympathetic people, guessed something of what she must feel, and had taken care that for the first week they should be quite alone, with no guests but Aunt Rachel and Lord Rootley. Sir Charles devoted himself to her, showing her everything about the place himself, and pointing out anything that he could recall as having been a favourite of his brother's. That quiet week quite restored Mrs. Pleydell to her usual calmness, and before the house began to fill she was quite herself again.

Eve, who had been moping and miserable during the quiet week, revived the moment that there was "anyone to talk to," and began to flirt as vehemently as ever, causing her mother to remark to Iris that she need not have distressed herself so much as she had

amiably done about Eve's unhappiness at being separated from her lover—really anyone else seemed to answer quite as well.

“I really think she does care for him, though,” said Iris; but Mrs. Pleydell shook her head, and would not be convinced.

She had allowed the lovers to meet in London as acquaintances—that is to say, she placed no restriction on their intercourse at balls and parties beyond the decree that Eve was not to be made conspicuous—but Claud was no longer allowed the free range of Grosvenor Street, nor, when he did call, were he and Eve left alone together; he was asked to dinner once or twice, but only when there was a party, and correspondence was entirely forbidden.

“You may think it very hard,” said Mrs. Pleydell, when he remonstrated: “I cannot help that. If I had not wanted to try you both, to see whether you could be depended on to care for each other in a year's time, I

should not have said that you must wait. It would be no proof of constancy if you were to meet or write to each other every day. Absence must be the test."

" 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder,' " he quoted, with a smile.

" 'Out of sight, out of mind,' and '*Les absents ont toujours tort*,' counterbalance that," she replied.

"Do you mean that I am not to see Eve again after you leave London until next year?"

"Not unless you meet accidentally. My plans are quite uncertain—I do not even know where we shall pass the winter."

"And you forbid correspondence?"

"Yes, I do, and shall take precautions to enforce my wishes."

"You are very hard upon us."

"Do you think so?" very coldly. "For my part, I think I have been far too lenient."

As has been said, Eve was very downcast while they were alone at Netherleigh, but the

moment the party began to assemble she was as bright and gay as ever.

Tom Pleydell, who came down a few days before the wedding, and was at once established as a great friend by Lady Netherleigh, found Eve as fascinating as ever, and could not resist the temptation of once more becoming her shadow, though he was of course aware that there was no hope for him.

"I say, Eve, you don't seem very down at your wedding being put off," observed Lady Hildegarde, when they arrived two days before the wedding, at which she was of course to be bridesmaid.

"Where's the good?" asked Eve. "I don't see that you look very wretched about Bertie Deverell."

"What is it somebody says about not wearing one's heart on one's sleeve?"

"Hildegarde!—you growing poetical! Wonders will never cease."

"It's all talk, my dear—I don't mean a word of it."

“But about Bertie?”

“I told you there’d be a bad Derby or something some day.”

“Well?”

“Well, there has been a bad Ascot, and I suppose the heiress is imminent. It’s only a little sooner than we expected.”

“Then it’s all over?”

“I suppose so. I told you it could never come to good. Are you very wretched without the adored Claud and at being disengaged again?”

“Oh! it’s very fair fun here. I’m amusing myself capitally.”

So Lady Hildegarde saw; she also saw that a certain Lord Albert Firlton was greatly smitten with Eve, and that she gave him every encouragement.

The wedding-day was all that could be desired, and Iris was a lovely bride. The breakfast was mercifully short, for the happy pair were obliged to start early to reach Pinefield,

where they were to spend the honeymoon, that evening.

At night there was a dance, at which Lord Albert was so devoted, and Eve encouraged him so openly, that, as they went upstairs, Lady Hildegarde said,

“I wonder what Mr. Urban would have said if he had seen you to-night?”

“What does it matter?” laughed Eve, recklessly. “*Quand on n’a pas ce qu’on aime, il faut aimer ce qu’on a !*”

After the wedding, Mrs. Pleydell and Eve paid a good many visits to various members of the Netherleigh family, and only returned to the Gate House for a short time before paying a long visit to the Beechmonts at Pinefield.

In one or two houses where they had stayed they had met Lord Albert, and Lady Hildegarde had insisted on having him at Pinefield, where Eve’s demeanour caused Iris to think that her mother was right, and

that, after all, Eve could not care much for Mr. Urban.

The doctors had decided that Lord Rootley was to spend the winter at Madeira, more as a precaution than because there was anything really the matter. The young couple suggested that Mrs. Pleydell and Eve should accompany them, but Mrs. Pleydell was far too wise, knowing how much better it is to leave young married people to themselves, more especially at first, and she at length decided that she and Eve would winter at Pau. She herself did not wish to return to Coalshire at present, and Eve took kindly to the idea of Pau, which she heard was very gay and pleasant.

They started about the middle of November, spent a short time in Paris, and reached Pau the beginning of December.

A little after Christmas Lord Albert made his appearance, and his name occurred so often in Eve's long letters, describing all the gaieties to Lady Hildegarde, that it was not wonderful that the latter, in one of her rare epistles,

observed that "she supposed it was a case, and that she should soon be called upon for congratulations."

She said in the same letter that they had met Mr. Urban several times lately in different houses, and that he was then staying at Pinefield for some balls. There was no word, however, or message to Eve, no sign that he had even asked after her. Captain Deverell, it appeared by a postscript, was engaged to the heiress, and Sir Charles was delighted.

It was the first week in March when Eve received another letter from Lady Hildegarde. She found it awaiting her on her return from a long ride, during which Lord Albert had contrived to detach her from the rest of the party and to propose to her. She had refused him, and he had not taken his disappointment well, but had reproached her so vehemently with the encouragement she had given him that he had quite upset her, and she returned very tired and went up at once to her own room. There when she had made herself comfortable in her

dressing-gown, and settled herself in her arm-chair, she opened the letter.

“DEAREST EVE,

“Of course I’ve been expecting it all this time, still I do think you might have let me know yourself, instead of leaving me to see it in the *Court Journal*. We all wish you joy. Lord Albert is very nice, and when you were here everyone saw what was coming. Who do you think showed me the announcement? Mr. Urban. He was staying here again for a few days, and he asked me to come into the library on Sunday afternoon and showed it me. I couldn’t help saying I had rather expected it, and then he said so had he from all he had heard,—and he hoped you would be happy, he believed Lord Albert was a very good sort of fellow. And then—oh, Eve, what will you say? but there of course it’s nothing to you now—then he asked me to marry him! He had been wishing to do so some time, he said, but

had felt that, though not formally engaged, he was still in honour bound to you. Now, of course, that was at an end, and would I make him happy?

“I thought I would be honest at once, and so I told him that I had cared very much for some one else, but that it was all over, and that if he did not mind that I would marry him. And he said very gravely that it would hardly be for him to object, for he had cared for you very much—how much you had never known—and so—it is all settled, and papa and mamma are very pleased. But I can’t forgive you for not writing to tell me yourself.

“Yours,—H.”

Eve sat absolutely stunned. So there was the end of it all! She had loved Claud so much, and he had left her for—her own great friend! And she had never thought of anyone else, though she had flirted with Lord Albert to amuse herself,—had never once dreamt of his proving disloyal to her?

And without waiting for confirmation, without even asking if the announcement of her marriage was true, he had left her for another ! And he had been wishing to do it for some time, and had only been restrained by feeling bound to her "in honour !" He who had vowed so often that he had never loved before, and could never love anyone but her !

It was all gone ! all over ! and Eve, stunned and miserable, covered her face with her hands and wished she were dead.

A tap at the door, and Rogers appeared.

"Will you wear the mauve or the green to-night, Miss Eve?"

"Neither. I am very tired, I shall go to bed at once."

"But, Miss Eve, you are to dine out, you know, your mamma is nearly ready."

"Tell mummy I'm ill—no, not that, I'm tired and have a bad headache ; I really can't go."

In a few moments Mrs. Pleydell appeared.

"What is this, Eve ? You really must make

an effort, it is wrong to disappoint people at the last moment."

"I wouldn't, indeed, if I could help it," Eve's tone was very low and subdued; "but I can't hold up my head."

"You do look ill," said her mother, looking in surprise at the white drawn face; "what is the matter, child?"

"It is my head, and I am so tired and cold," and she shivered.

"Well, you really are not fit to go out; it is no fancy, I see. I must take your excuses. Go to bed at once and have some soup, and if you are not better to-morrow we must have the doctor."

"Give me a kiss before you go, mummy."

It was so unusual a request for Eve that her mother felt a thrill almost of alarm. She kissed her and said, anxiously,

"You feel very ill, Eve?"

"No, only just one of my bad headaches, and it is so cold."

"Get her to bed at once, Rogers, I must go

now, or else I shall be late. Good night, Eve dear," with another kiss, which was fervently returned.

"I don't want any soup, Rogers," said Eve, when she was undressed; "I only want to sleep. Don't come back again, and I shall lock my door, lest mummy should come in when she comes home and wake me. I shall be—all right in the morning."

When Eve heard Rogers, having put away all her mother's things, pass along the corridor to her own room, she slipped out of bed, and glided along the passage to Mrs. Pleydell's room. There was only firelight, but that was enough for her purpose; she knew where her mother's keys were kept, and in a moment she had opened the dressing-case and seized the bottle she wanted. Noiselessly she replaced everything, and returned to her own room.

"I cannot bear it," she said to herself, "I love him so! and to see him married to anyone else! And I could not bear to be pitied. Good-bye, Claud."

When the next morning Eve's door was at length broken open, she lay as if asleep, but every trace of life had long fled. On the table was the empty bottle of chloral, in her hand Lady Hildegarde's letter.

Poor pretty, selfish, undisciplined Eve had passed away for ever !

THE END.

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